

# Editorial

In this issue of the Journal are a variety of articles on different, though not unconnected, themes. Gordon Palmer challenges us to ask whether head knowledge of Christian doctrine is sufficient preparation for membership of a congregation; he wonders if there ought not also to be pastoral training in discipleship as well an understanding of the doctrines of the Creeds. Campbell Campbell-Jack rebukes those of us who are beginning to blame a post-modern culture for our disappointments in ministry; he challenges us to grasp the opportunities which are as abundant as ever, if only we had the eyes to see them. Stafford Carson reminds us that in a rapidly changing world, our God is never thwarted by change; the problem with such a dramatically changing culture is not with God, but with those who live in the past instead of in the present. David Montgomery (his article is the first chapter of a book shortly to be published) takes up the controversial subject of 'praise' - 'worship' it is often called—and lays the first foundations of a biblical

approach to the thorny problem of choosing and leading worship in the 21st century.

### Keeping our eye on the ball

I believe all these articles deal with extremely important pastoral issues, otherwise they would not be appearing in the Journal. However, vital as they are, I remain convinced that at the heart of all we strive to do in our ministries is the preaching of the Word of God. Jim Taylor's short article reminds us of that, and of the personal cost involved in faithful preaching.

I want, however, to indulge myself a little in this editorial, and reflect on my own pilgrimage in the task of preaching. Looking back, I see with increasing clarity that for me preaching has been a journey—a journey of discovery. I have been forced to learn one lesson, only to find that another lesson was waiting to be mastered, and then another, and another. The temptation is always there for preachers to regard themselves as having at last graduated and so now able

## Contents

- 1 Editorial
- 4 The Biblical Context of Praise  
David Montgomery
- 8 Ministry in the New Millennium  
Stafford Carson
- 12 New Wineskins  
Campbell Campbell-Jack
- 19 The Trial and Triumph of Faith  
Samuel Rutherford
- 23 Initiation and Nurture  
Gordon Palmer
- 29 Ann Allen meets Howard Taylor
- 32 A Hazardous Calling  
James Taylor
- 35 Book Reviews

to exercise a preaching ministry which is no longer by someone still under divine instruction. Let me explain what I mean.

### **From ranting to reasoning**

As a very young man, not yet twenty years old, I began preaching in a vacant pulpit near my home town. Though I spent long hours in preparation and used fairly full notes, I was influenced in those days by preachers I had heard whose style was one continuous act of declaiming. So I shouted at the handful who turned up for the services, often seizing them by the scruff of the neck and holding them over the flames of hell. I had a 'scorched earth' approach to preaching, and at least every second sentence was introduced by the authoritative statement (intentionally Billy Graham-like), 'The Bible says...' followed by direct quote after direct quote.

Far be it from me to cast aspersions on such a preaching style. Some no doubt have used it with great effect and evident blessing from God. But my use of this method produced, I now feel, a 'rant' which must have been hard to listen to and offensive to older people from one who was so young.

At the age of twenty three and after five years of tertiary education, I took up the pastorate of a small village congregation and I began a series of sermons on Genesis, starting with the Call of Abraham, using in my preparation two or three commentaries along with the printed sermons of Alexander Maclaren. Slowly and painfully, I realised that I must address the minds of my tiny congregation; I must present them with an argued case, week by week, my reasoning being founded and grounded wholly on the words of Scripture. I was learning—not least through the ongoing dialogue each Sunday evening with my young wife who tirelessly sought to evaluate my preaching with me — to demonstrate the validity of the Word, to persuade my people of the rightness of the teaching, to lead my congregation forward in understanding the unfolding of divine truth and the plan of salvation for them.

Over twenty years I continued to

learn more of this lesson. I worked hard to leave behind the declamatory style as I discovered that gentle pleading could be more effective than ear-deafening thunderings. I suppose I was influenced in this by two aspects of modern technology. First, a public address system in the church did away with the need to shout in order to be heard. Second, with the advent of television, people became accustomed to a person addressing them in a conversational voice. However, the deeper, more telling lesson for me was that preaching must be an appeal to the mind.

***I must be the (very human) instrument through whom the voice of Christ can be heard. It must be him my congregation are listening to, not me. It must be his truth, not mine***

Hand in hand with that went the development of my own understanding of the Scriptures. If I was to teach my people, I must be learning myself. So I engaged in long hours of study, disciplining myself to squeeze into each day the maximum time at my desk without neglecting the other necessary aspects of ministry. Anyone looking on might have thought my regime was too Spartan and might even have accused me of pushing myself far too hard. I doubt however if I would have listened to such protests: I was absolutely resolved to be a teacher of the Word! Therefore I myself must at all costs expand my own knowledge of the Word.

### **Addressing the whole person**

The preacher is best to be closely involved with those to whom he is preaching. As I visited my members in all the varying pastoral situations which arose week by week, it began to come home to me that my resolve to address the mind in my preaching required some major adjustments. These men and women also had deep emotions. They experienced joy and sorrow, happiness

and pain, friendship and loneliness. They also had strong wills. I recall one member (who never missed a service) saying to me early on in my second ministry, 'I told a lie before you became my minister, and I will keep on telling a lie now you are my minister!' He was informing me that his will was protected by an invisible suit of armour which would never be penetrated by my sermons!

While continuing to teach the word to my people's minds, increasingly I saw I must not neglect their emotions and I must also challenge their wills. The dan-

gers of emotionalism were not lost on me; nor was I unaware of the impossibility of ever reaching a human will without the direct assistance of the Holy Spirit. Looking back over a period of some twenty years of preaching, I see how I wrestled every week in my study to achieve a rounded kind of sermon which had the right balance of appeal to mind, emotions and will.

Without feigning modesty, I can honestly say that I rarely achieved my aim. It was an ongoing struggle which often left me near to despair. The wisdom of winning souls does not come easily to anyone. The skill of finding the way into the hearts of those listening, of bringing them to recognise their need of grace, and of enabling them to submit to Christ; I covetted with all my heart. Oh the joy of even occasionally coming close to attaining it!

### **An ambassador**

In that struggle to learn and put into practice the delicate and difficult balance of delivering sermons which addressed minds, wills and emotions, it was impossible not to find myself grap-

pling with a further twofold dimension of preaching—that of presenting and representing Christ himself. My calling was to preach Christ crucified and risen. But my calling was also to speak as Christ's ambassador, as though he himself was speaking. Here was yet another huge problem for every preacher!

I found great help in understanding the person and work of the Holy Spirit in preaching through reading *Volume 3* of John Owen's writings. I saw in an altogether new way that the great task of the Spirit, now Christ's physical presence has been withdrawn from earth, is to

### **Preaching into a situation**

It was not until I surrendered my pulpit and came to my present appointment that I began to discover something else about preaching which I had vaguely realised but never sharply defined. I found that preaching is best accomplished when the pastor of the people preaches to a situation known and understood. Much of Christ's teaching was directed to one person.<sup>1</sup>

It is not that a visiting preacher (as I invariably am nowadays) cannot be used by God and experience real blessing and help when faced by a congregation of

experience the privilege of knowing Christ himself speaking directly through his own Word into each situation with transforming power and redeeming grace. May his smile be upon all who stand and speak as his personal representatives!

<sup>1</sup> Ronald Wallace makes this same point in, *On the Interpretation and Use of the Bible*, Scottish Academic Press, Edinburgh, 1999, p.55ff.

## ***The pastor who identifies himself with his flock, sharing their joys and sorrows, sitting where they sit, leading them forward in their united life and witness, will be able to preach right into their situation in a way which no visiting speaker ever could***

bring to us Christ's spiritual presence. The implications of this for pulpit ministry I realised were immense. I must be the (very human) instrument through whom the voice of Christ could be heard. It must be him my congregation were listening to, not me. It must be his truth, not mine.

I know that every preacher knows this to some extent right from the start of any ministry. I had known it in theory and I believe at times I had also known it in practice. But now it became a passion and the prayer I prayed as I preached: that Jesus Christ himself would 'happen' and that my people would meet with him. I must be incidental.

I am not advocating a 'nothingness' theology for the preacher; I am aware of a kind of self-abnegation which is quite unbiblical. God has chosen to use people, with all their faults and limitations. He has condescended to 'need' me. Yet, I could either be the man he used or I could obstruct his work. I wanted more than anything to be Christ's ambassador and be someone who was the medium of Christ's presence.

complete strangers. Rather is it that preaching ought to be translating the Bible into terms which are startling relevant for today and the situation in which the hearers find themselves. The pastor who identifies himself with his flock, sharing their joys and sorrows, sitting where they sit, leading them forward in their united life and witness, will be able to preach right into their situation in a way which no visiting speaker ever could.

I suppose it is this I miss most in my work at Rutherford House, but it is this latest discovery in my own 'preaching journey' which I believe I must share with those with whom I work. In the proclamation of the Word of God it is in this way that the 'then and there' of Scripture merges with the 'here and now' of the congregation. It is here that the culture of the day is engaged with by the preacher as sermons take on a relevance which can be electrifying, startling and convincing.

My earnest prayer is that as we preachers travel along in this journey of discovery, we will all increasingly ex-

# The Biblical

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*The following article is the first chapter of a book 'Sing a New Song' on choosing and leading praise in the 21st century: to be published in January 2000 by Rutherford House & Handsel Press*

## Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs

Those who have long sought a solution to the rather unnecessary division between 'hymn' and 'chorus/worship-song', have tended to resort to Paul's command in Ephesians 5:19 (repeated in Col. 3:16) to 'speak to' or 'admonish one another' in 'psalms, hymns and spiritual songs'. Here, it is argued, is a clear three-fold level of praise outlined by the apostle, with all levels having their proper place in the church's worship: canonical praise (psalms), acanonical religious poetry (hymns), and short devotional items of praise (choruses/worship songs).

This interpretation is not without its problems, not least because it seems to be reading the text in the light of a very specific late twentieth-century liturgical phenomenon. There are other difficulties, however. Regarding this twice-mentioned command, there is no immediate agreement among scholars as to the precise differentiation of categories. Some suggest that there may be no difference, all three referring to freely composed improvised lyrics.<sup>1</sup> Some Cal-

vinistic churches, for example the Free Churches in Scotland, also see this phrase as a *hendiadys* (a list of terms to express one idea), but believe the terms refer to three different sections of the canonical Psalter. With respect, although this interpretation has a long history, it appears to be a clear case of *eisegesis* (reading already held presuppositions into the text).

## The Regulative Principle Revisited

Those who favour it claim that they are adhering consistently to the 'regulative principle'. This principle, put simply, states that whatever Scripture does not command is forbidden. In over-reaction to Roman abuses in worship, the Puritans interpreted the regulative principle in such a way that everything was excluded from the worshipping environment which could not be traced back to a specific scriptural precedent. Therefore, in this scenario, unaccompanied psalms became the only valid form of sung praise. However, many within the broader reformed family have begun to question this 'restrictive, austere and minimalist' use of the regulative principle.<sup>2</sup>

John Frame, in particular, has contributed much in achieving an understanding of how one can maintain the regulative principle, while still admitting contemporary hymnody and

instrumentation as well as movement, dance and drama in worship. Frame believes in the regulative principle. He sees this classic reformed position as stronger than the one adopted by Lutherans and Episcopalians where anything was permitted unless it was specifically forbidden, because it gives Scripture a positive and proactive authority over the whole of our lives rather than a negative reactive power of veto.<sup>3</sup> But for Frame, the essence of the regulative principle rests in the fact that our worship must be acceptable to God, and that we cannot simply worship 'as we please'.

When it comes to determining how that principle is applied to worship services, however, a great deal of Christian prudence is required. The Westminster Divines recognised this, and allowed flexibility in certain circumstances.<sup>4</sup> Frame critiques and extends their interpretation to include a wide variety of applications where flexibility and creativity are not only to be permitted but are desirable: namely, the words of prayers, the accompaniment of songs, the time and place of worship services. He makes the valid point that even if one chooses to sing only psalms, one has to choose which version, translation or metricisation to use, and whether the music will be in a traditional or modern style.<sup>5</sup>

Whereas the narrow Puritan application of the regulative principle was

# Context of Praise

riddled with inconsistencies and prompted many fruitless debates, Frame's application is both more consistent and truly biblical. Instead of regarding some things as mere circumstances which are not bound by the regulative principle, he seeks to bring every aspect of worship (including when and where we worship) under the Lordship of Christ, so that they are honouring to God. Hence he makes no distinction between 'officially sanctioned' worship services, and 'informal fellowship gatherings', as the Puritan interpretation demands, for all worship must be as God desires. Nor does he divide worship into specific elements each of which requires a specific scriptural mandate (again as was the practice of the Puritans) for that is what typified the Old Testament tabernacle and temple, rather than the worship of the New Covenant people. Rather, he endorses the Puritans' concern for worship that is Word-based and God-honouring, but applies it more broadly. For Frame, the regulative principle more often applies to the manner of worship, than to its form.

He shows how in Scripture we find both general principles (1Cor. 10:31) as well as many relatively specific principles (Jas 2:1-4): 'Where specifics are lacking, we must apply the generalities by means of our sanctified wisdom, within the general principles of the word. Where specifics are given, we

must accept them and apply them even more specifically to our own particular situations.'<sup>16</sup>

## Defining the 'Psalm'

Outside of those who are enthusiastic proponents of the narrow application of the regulative principle, one struggles to find a single scholar who accepts that the three terms in Ephesians 5:19 apply exclusively to canonical psalms. It is not even clear that *psalmoi* refers only to canonical psalms (see below), so any attempt to limit the scope of the other two terms is entirely without warrant. In fact, John Stott asserts that *psalmoi* actually implies a musical accompaniment!<sup>17</sup>

The language of Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 implies some progression of thought, even if the marks of that progression are not clear. The phrase in Greek reads *psalmoi humnois kai odais pneumatikais*. *Psalmos* occurs seven times in the NT, and in four of these it is a clear reference to the OT Book of Psalms. Of the other three, there are the Ephesians and Colossians passages, and the only other occurrence is in 1Corinthians 14:26 where Paul is discussing the components of a worship service. While consistency may suggest that *psalmos* here be translated also as 'psalm' (contra NIV 'hymn')<sup>18</sup> the context implies a spontaneous revelatory

song, in keeping with the other items on the list.<sup>19</sup>

This is further substantiated when one examines the four uses of the related verb *psallein* (Rom. 15:9; 1Cor. 14:15; Eph. 5:19 and Jas 5:13). While it cannot be proven that each verse does not refer to a canonical psalm, the context of all but the first makes a Christian song a more likely interpretation. N. T. Wright, in his commentary, states: 'Psalms may actually refer to the Christian use of the OT Psalter but shouldn't be restricted to that; the early church was prolific in its adaptation of Old Testament themes to Christian use, and in its composition of new material'.<sup>20</sup>

What starts to become clear as one looks at the lexical evidence, is that there is a fair amount of ambiguity and interchangeability between the terms. For example, when *humnos* (hymn) is used in Matthew 26:30 and Mark 14:26, for the song which Jesus and his disciples sang after the Last Supper, it is more than likely that this was one (or more) of the 'Hallel Psalms' (Pss 113-18) which were traditionally sung at the end of the Passover. Where the case for a narrow application of the regulative principle falls, however, is that in 1Corinthians 14, Ephesians 5 and Colossians 3, there is contextual evidence that not only psalms or canonical words were being used in worship: in each case *psalmos* is part of a list.

Not only in Paul but also in Josephus<sup>11</sup> psalmos is juxtaposed with *humnos*. The other uses of *humnos* outside the specifically Jewish context of Matthew 26 and Mark 14 point to a new, creative hymnic activity which need not necessarily have a canonical base. It is used in the Septuagint for a 'new song' in Isaiah 42:10, and in Psalm 65:13 for general praise (cf. Heb. 2:12); and when Paul and Silas were in prison they rejoiced by singing *humnoi* (Acts 16:25).

### The Rise, Fall and Rebirth of the Christian Hymn

It is true that in the 4th century there was an orthodox reaction against paraphrases replacing exact quotations of Scripture. This was probably to safeguard doctrine and is characteristic of the more controlling and hierarchical structure of authority which was emerging in the church at that time. It does, however, indicate that freely composed lyrics were being used. One can think immediately of the Latin classics such as the *Gloria in excelsis*, or the *Te Deum*. When Pliny the Younger wrote his famous letter regarding Christian worship he refers to the chanting of verses in honour of Christ, as to God, and this appears to have been normative practice throughout the early centuries.<sup>12</sup> If one looks at Ephesians 5:18 (immediately preceding the verse discussed above), we see that this is probably a quote from an early hymn. What's more, it specifically mentions the name of Christ: 'Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.'

In recent centuries, the person who has argued most cogently for the rightful place of hymns within the Christian

church has been Isaac Watts. Famous for his hymn-writing, what is not so well-known is the fact that he had to debate rigorously for his hymns to be accepted by the church as valid for worship. Within his lifetime the majority of congregations in Britain moved from a position of singing psalms alone, to one where hymns had gained a popular acceptance: a testimony not only to the quality of his hymns but to the convincing nature of his argumentation. I have written more fully elsewhere on the arguments he employed<sup>13</sup> and reproduce here only a couple of his most pertinent statements:

What need is there that I should wrap up the shining honours of my Redeemer in the dark and shadowy language of a religion that is for now forever abolished, especially when Christians are so vehemently warned in the Epistles of St. Paul against a Judaizing spirit in their worship as well as doctrine?<sup>14</sup>

Moses, Deborah...David, Asaph and Habakkuk...sung their own joys and victories, their own hopes and fears and deliverances...and why must we under the gospel sing nothing else but the joys, hopes and fears, of Asaph and David? Why must Christians be forbid all other melody but what arises from the victories and deliverances of the Jews?<sup>15</sup>

If the brightest genius on earth, or an angel from heaven, should translate David, and keep close to the sense and style of the inspired author, we should only obtain thereby a bright or heavenly copy

***Isaac Watts... Famous for his hymn-writing, what is not so well-known is the fact that he had to debate rigorously for his hymns to be accepted by the church as valid for worship***

of the devotions of the Jewish king, but it could never make the fittest psalmbook for a Christian people.<sup>16</sup>

### The Place of the 'Spiritual Song'

Leaving those who would wish to impose a rigidly canonical criterion on the categories mentioned in Ephesians 5:19, what then of those who plead for free improvisation and simple non-technical devotional repetition? Well, if they are advocating this as the only valid form of Christian worship, they run into similar exegetical and historical problems. The very existence of the Psalter, along with its use by Jesus and his disciples, and the existence of creative, but clearly structured early Christian hymns,<sup>17</sup> shows that the people of God had a canon of praise of some sort which was used repeatedly to teach doctrine and aid memorisation.

Are we then, after all, left with a threefold division which fits very nicely into the contemporary psalm-hymn-chorus phenomenon? I don't think it's as simple as that. For a start, if, as it is argued, *odais pneumatikais* refers to original, spontaneous, Spirit-given outbursts of new praise (cf. Rev. 5:9; 14:3), then virtually none of the contemporary worship choruses fall into this category. Some of these choruses are taken straight from the Scriptures, while many others tend to be written over time and tried out in different contexts, before being published and used thereafter as components in new and varied contemporary liturgies. In 1986, one of the British contemporary writers Dave Fellingham stated at a Kingsway Musicians' Conference at Swanwick that 'only once' did a song come to him immediately without any planning, experimenting or background work.

Such workshops and conferences exist to encourage and teach song-writing within this medium. No, it appears that contemporary choruses must be judged by the same criteria as traditional hymns, for there are no exegetical or theological reasons to regard them as being in substance different. The spiritual songs to which Paul alluded

probably were, or at least included, spontaneous charismatic praise offerings.<sup>18</sup>

## The Role of the 'Hymn'

How then should these acanonical hymns/songs be defined? One of the earliest standard definitions was by Augustine who defined a hymn as containing the three elements of 'song', 'praise' and 'towards God'.<sup>19</sup> This, however, could discount the possibility that hymns may not only be 'to God about God' ('Immortal, invisible, God only wise'); or 'to God about us' ('My faith looks up to thee'); but also 'to us about God' ('Onward Christian soldiers').<sup>20</sup> This dimension of mutual encouragement is clearly expressed in both the Colossians and Ephesians passages. While both do mention that the praise is directed towards the Lord, both also contain the command to speak to, or admonish one another. Such a horizontal dimension can also be seen in certain of the psalms.<sup>21</sup>

It appears that, when considering the lyrics of hymns, several factors need to be held in tension such as biblical faithfulness, congregational edification, and poetic competence.

The fact that a piece is poetically and musically excellent is not sufficient to warrant its inclusion in worship if it teaches theology which is antithetical to Scripture. If hymns, as I argue later, have a didactic role to play, bad theology is counter-productive and inappropriate for the context of worship. I am certainly not advocating, of course, an avoidance of such works of music or literature, nor saying that Christians can only be edified by reading that with which they agree. Rather, that in the very specific context of worship, truth is of the utmost importance (John 4:24) and the exclusion of material on this basis is valid.

Congregational edification is also important. Rogal distinguishes, for example, between the hymn and other types of religious poetry. Some offerings from poets such as Donne and Emerson ('Hymne to Christ'; 'Concord Hymn') may technically qualify as hymns but their contribution to corpor-

ate worship would probably be minimal.<sup>22</sup>

Neither should one forget the role of good poetry. For example, if the work is not poetically disciplined, but crowded with images, colloquialisms, bad use of metre or rhyme, or anachronistic terms which grate on the ear, it becomes a hindrance rather than an aid to worship. Dean comments:

A hymn is one of the most tightly structured poems in the tradition.... Few poets these days have learned the skill of writing such formal verse.... To speak naturally about God, one's emotions, and one's ultimate concern in tight restrictive poems is not something modern or post-modern poets do well.<sup>23</sup>

So, to return to Paul, it seems that, with the exception of a spontaneous charismatic outburst of joy (which is an entirely different matter), and use of the canonical Psalms, all other material must fall under the category of humnoi, and be analysed accordingly. But this should not imply restriction to one type of humnoi. In all of this, the key word is variety. Tom Wright reminds us: 'Together these three terms indicate a variety and richness of Christian singing which should neither be stereotyped into one mould nor restricted simply to weekly public worship'.<sup>24</sup>

## Endnotes

- See C. F. D. Moule, *Worship in the New Testament*, London: Lutterworth Press, 1961, p. 69ff.
- J. Frame, *Worship in Spirit and Truth*, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 1996, p. xii. See also T. W. J. Morrow's review of this book in *The Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology*, Spring 1999.
- Ibid., p. 38. For a summary of the historical arguments see J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life*, Wheaton: Crossway, 1990, pp. 246–9.
- Westminster Confession of Faith*, 1.6.
- See J. Frame, *Contemporary Worship Music*, p. 29, n. 3.
- Ibid., pp. 54–5.
- J. Stott, *God's New Society*, Leicester: IVP, 1979, p. 205. Musical accompaniment is forbidden in the free churches which rigorously follow the regulative principle.
- W. Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (2nd ed., revised by Arndt, Gingrich and Danker), London: University of Chicago Press, 1979, categorises this reference separately as 'a Christian song of praise'.
- See G. Fee 1st Corinthians, NICNT Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993, pp. 671, 690.
- N. T. Wright, *Colossians and Philemon*, Leicester: IVP, 1993, p. 145.
- Josephus, *Antiquities*: 12:323.
- Pliny Letters x. 96, addressed to Trajan c. AD 112. See also J. A. Smith, 'The Ancient Synagogue, the Early Church and Singing', *Music and Letters* 65 (1984), pp. 1–16.
- 'Isaac Watts and Artistic Kenosis', *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 5 (1987), pp. 174–84.
- Watts, *Poetical Works* (7 vols), Edinburgh, 1782, vol. I, p. xxxvi.
- Vol. I, p. xxvii.
- Vol. I, p. xliv.
- See above. It is inconclusive, but still possible, that some NT passages such as Phil. 2:6–11, or 2Tim. 2:11–13 were hymns or fragments of hymns. For arguments against see G. Fee, *Philippians*, NICNT, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995.
- G. D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994, pp. 653–4, 885–6.
- See A. Wilson-Dickson, *The Story of Christian Music*, Oxford: Lion, 1992, p. 25.
- Mission Praise, nos. 327, 469, 543.
- E.g. Pss 95, 122.
- S. J. Rogal, *A General Introduction to Hymnody and Congregational Song*, Metuchen: Scarecrow, 1991, p. 6.
- W. Dean, *A Survey of Twentieth Century Church Music in America*, Nashville: Broadman Press, 1988, p. 223.
- N. T. Wright, *Colossians and Philemon*, p. 145.

# Ministry in the

## The challenge of postmodernism to the churches from a Northern Ireland perspective

A regular Radio 2 phone-in competition asks listeners to come up with a witty newspaper headline for an unusual news story. One recent story offered was about a Church of England vicar who was holding a service of worship in the local pub. A clever listener, obviously a Star Trek fan, proposed the headline, 'It's kirk, Captain, but not as we know it!'

Some of the pundits tell us that as we face the changes and challenges of a new millennium, we cannot assume that we will continue to 'do church' as we have always done it. We may want to withdraw to some safe haven where change will never invade and where yesterday will live forever. But that is not an option. At one level, the church is no more exempt from change than business or education or family life or government. Like it or not, God has called us to minister in the world, and the world is changing.

### **Change is no threat to God**

The Reformers' slogan, 'The Church reformed and always reforming' is one

that we endorse. That doesn't mean that we are ready to dispense with everything in the name of change or that everything is up for grabs. Rather, we believe our God is a big and a Sovereign God, and changes in the world are no threat to his eternal purposes. In fact, we welcome change and are ready to change so that we can glorify and exalt his name to an even greater extent. We want the church to be more God-glorifying than it is now. We want to see more people coming to faith in Christ and being built up in the faith.

We do not do that by holding on to the past, or pretending it is still 1960, far less wishing it was 1899 and not 1999. God has wants us to be his people today! We are called to minister now, to meet present demands, not to fight the battles of yesterday. We need to move forward into the future with hope, faith and confidence that God will continue to build His church.

### **Megachange**

In the Western world we are living in a period of massive change. Commenta-

tors have described the 1990s as the decade of megachange when so much has changed at breakneck speed. Indeed, many people are living for change. Adjectives such as 'overwhelming', 'accelerated', 'extraordinary' and 'explosive' to describe the changes that we face.

One futurist, Joel Arthur Barker, provides a list of some fundamental changes that have taken place in the world in the last 20 years. His list includes the following items:

- the introduction of environmentalism as a legitimate way of perceiving the world—every living thing is inter-connected
- terrorism as an everyday activity
- deregulation of banking, the air lines and telecommunications
- VCRs
- the almost total disappearance of union power
- the loss of respect for major institutions
- the emergence of information as a key resource
- public language on tv and radio incorporating cursing and strong sexual connotation within normal programming.
- cohabitation as an acceptable substitute for marriage
- fibre optics
- the women's movement
- the 'uncloseting' of gays and other

# New Millennium

**The Revd. Stafford Carson**

**Carnmoney Presbyterian Church, Northern Ireland**

previously hidden minorities

- Japan as a producer of the highest quality products
- cellular phones
- 'safe' sex
- the greenhouse effect
- the explosion in the use of personal computers in the home and office

In times of exploding change, a 'business-as-usual' mentality is out of the question. One commentator says that the boundaries that once served us no longer exist. The rules are constantly changing. But people cannot live without boundaries, without structure, without rules. So new ones have sprung up in order to fill the void left by those that no longer seem to serve our 'new age' condition.

### **Dying for change**

How has all this change affected the church? It seems that in the Western world at the end of this century and the dawning of a new era, the church is not doing well. Someone has said, it is 'dying for change'. It is as though the church has admitted itself into hospital and spends much of its time heavily sedated and sleeping under the covers of the 1940s and 1950s.

What has gone wrong? What is the diagnosis? The problem appears to be threefold. First, churches—especially the mainline denominations—are in decline.

Second, the unchurched population is growing. Third, the spiritual void is being filled in part by a number of cults and non-Christian religious groups.

We only need to read the annual reports of our various denominations to realise how great is the decline. Even in areas where new churches have been planted in recent decades, we have simply followed the movement of population. My own congregation in Carnmoney, East Belfast, grew in the 1970s, not because great numbers of people were converted to Christ from unbelief, but simply because the

### ***'It's kirk, Captain, but not as we know it!'***

churches of North Belfast were emptied as people moved out to the new houses in the suburbs. We have this phenomenon, which is not unique to Ireland, of people circulating from church to church. Some people leave a Presbyterian congregation to go to a house church or another denomination; some come the other way. But overall there is no real increase.

### ***'Ignostics'***

In addition, we have lost from the church much of the baby boomer generation

altogether. The 'baby boom' is the term for the explosion of births which took place between 1946 and 1964. And baby boomers have entered midlife in the 1990s. Generally well-educated, they benefited from the developments in schools and colleges and new job opportunities which took place in the 1960s. Yet many of them, whilst raised in church, have not stayed in church. Talk to them today and they will tell you about their days in the BB or GB or Sunday School but now many of them are nowhere spiritually.

The 'baby busters' are the children of the baby boomers; they are the generation of 8-25 year olds. And since they are the children of non-churchgoing baby boomers, many of them have no idea whatsoever about church. Whilst their parents dropped out of church, the baby busters have never even been in church to begin with. One writer calls baby busters 'ignostics'. They have no Christian background, no memory of church and no Christian vocabulary. They are 'ignostics' who don't know what Christians are talking about.

Note however an important point. While many in our generation have said no to church, it does not mean that they are uninterested in spiritual matters. They hold high levels of religious belief and many of them want religious training for their children. As a result of one survey of religious trends, George Gal-

lup concludes that while the number of 'belongers' has decreased, the number of 'believers' has actually increased. He goes on to say that there is more religious belief than there was a decade ago and there is considerable potential for the return of the 'unchurched' to more active church life.

### **'Believers' not 'belongers'**

Last year I made a point of going to as many of the wedding receptions following marriage services in Carnmoney as I could; and I made a point of talking to the young people who were guests at the marriage of their friends. I found it a fascinating experience. On quite a number of occasions it was a case of a girl from Northern Ireland who had gone across the water to study returning home to be married. Inevitably the best man or the bridesmaids were Scots or English.

I sat beside the best man at one reception. He told me that it was the third occasion in his life when he had worn a suit. One previous occasion was the night of the wedding rehearsal. He was so nervous, he said, because he didn't know what to do. He had never been in church in his life before. Another Scottish girl who was bridesmaid at a wedding didn't know anything about Christianity. She had never been in Sunday School, had never spoken to a minister in her life and she was intrigued by the whole service of Christian worship.

It is this generation of 'agnostics' that we need to reach with the Gospel. For many of them, it is not a case of saying no to Christ, because they have never really heard the gospel in the first place. They are an unreached generation for whom church has been irrelevant.

What is important to remember about the baby bust generation is that they are young people who are at an age when they can be reached with the Gospel. Research consistently shows those under the age of 18 are most likely to accept Christ as their Saviour. Currently about two thirds of all decisions for Christ happen by that age. Whatever else we do in the new millennium in terms of church activity, we must not forget about our children and young people.

### **An irrelevant church**

We also have to acknowledge that a growing spirit of secularism has resulted in many people saying quite openly and honestly that church is no longer relevant to them. In Ireland, a previous generation had an accepted sense of respect for mainline denominations, and a visit to the home of a lapsed member or family would often result in an improved pattern of attendance at church. People were afraid the minister or others in their community would think less of them if they refused to be associated with the church. Church membership was part of what it meant to be a respected member of the community. The services of a minister and the church were seen as necessary for the rites of passage at birth, death or marriage. That is no longer the case. An increasing number of funerals arrive at the Belfast crematorium with no clergyman in attendance.

I have to ask if this new honesty about the church altogether a bad thing. Is it not easier for us to address with the Gospel those who are clearly outside the fellowship of the church than to try to evangelise self-righteous, churchgoing people who have a form of godliness but

who do not know the renovating power of the Gospel? The new millennium may herald a new evangelistic opportunity so that we can reach out meaningfully with the Gospel to those who are clearly and self-consciously unconverted and unchurched.

### **Massive growth of cults**

The fact that the church is in decline and the unchurched population is growing is frightening enough. However those trends have created a spiritual vacuum which a number of cults and non-Christian groups are filling. Mormons are one of the world's richest and fastest growing religious movements. Since the end of the Second World War, its numbers have quadrupled to more than 8 million members worldwide. In the USA, Mormons outnumber Presbyterians and Episcopalians combined. The number of Jehovah's Witnesses has doubled in the last 20 years. On top of that, there is the whole variety of New Age religions which are flourishing. It is estimated that both Buddhism and Islam have doubled their number of adherents in recent years.

This all indicates that there is still a great interest in spiritual matters and the early years of the 21st century should be a time of unprecedented opportunity for reaching the unchurched for Christ. Many are asking spiritual questions. After all, we are made in the image of God, and try as people might, they cannot suppress their appetite for God and for spirituality.

### **Critical question for churches**

The critical question for the churches is this: Are we prepared to pay the price to reach lost people for Christ? Are we ready to make the changes which will enable us to speak the Gospel clearly and relevantly to our generation?

Please do not misunderstand what I am saying. I am not suggesting we try to formulate some new Gospel or some new message. I remember as a child, when recovering from illness, my mother buying me a bottle of Lucozade. It was unlike any other bottle because it was wrapped in this beautiful, transparent, orange paper. I recall lying in bed

***The new millennium may herald a new evangelistic opportunity so that we can reach out meaningfully with the Gospel to those who are clearly and self-consciously unconverted and unchurched***

## *In addressing this post-modern age in which we live, we need to pay attention to our packaging and presentation*

and seeing my bedroom in a whole new light through this coloured paper. But today Lucozade comes in a whole range of different bottles. It's no longer consumed only by people recovering from illness. It is a fashionable, hip, modern drink which is marketed by using modern images and modern music. Yet the contents of the bottle remain unchanged.

In addressing this post-modern age in which we live, we need to pay attention to our packaging and presentation. There is no use in us saying, 'Well, if it was alright for our grandparents, then it's alright for us. We've done it like this

for the past 50 years, why change?' If you have done it the same way for 50 years, then the chances are there is probably a better way to do it. A church which refuses to change and adapt is certain to atrophy and die. We are in danger of ecclesiastical extinction if we tenaciously hold on to outdated methods and practices which were developed when Britain had an empire and when men wore Brylcreme.

But what we cannot change is the content of our message. We must modernise the bottle, but we cannot adulterate or dilute its contents. The New Testament is crystal clear on that.

It repeatedly calls for the preservation and the transmission of the apostolic gospel in its original form. As the apostle puts it in his letters to Timothy, in the absence of 'sound doctrine', 'sound instruction', or the 'pattern of sound teaching', there is no Christian faith. Paul says that we can only grow in Christ if we stay within this doctrinal framework, for its truth provides the means for our growth.

# New Wineskins

**W.CampbellCampbell-Jack, Dumfries**

*Dr Campbell-Jack challenges us to think again about postmodernity and asks if this revolution in culture does not present the church with a golden opportunity to return to the obedience to Christ which alone will enable us to be effective.*

The interaction of church and culture has always been a problematic issue. It is one which we have to retain at the forefront of our minds and prayers as at present the Lordship of Christ in any meaningful way has been lost in great swathes of the church. Nevertheless in today's rapidly changing cultural environment we have an opportunity of recovering something of the dynamism of a people living together with their Lord.

## 2+2 never equals 697

There has always been interaction between the Lordship of Christ and the culture surrounding the church. On the one hand, heroes of the faith like Francis of Assisi, the covenanters and Dietrich Bonhoeffer stood against the encroachment of the surrounding culture and the distortions it can bring to the church. On the other hand, there are also heroes like Hudson Taylor and William Booth who have endeavoured to live and speak the eternal gospel in a way which made immediate contact with the surround-

ing culture. In every changing situation we must discern the correct response.

Encounter with the surrounding culture is as inevitable as it is necessary. We do not face a choice between outright rejection or complete assimilation. Whilst we may proclaim different values and have a differing hope, the plasticity of creation remains the same for us all. When someone is converted to faith in Christ,  $2+2$  does not suddenly equals 697. We live in the same communities, work in the same factories, use the same forms of reason in our discourse.

We are pilgrims travelling through alien lands. While we must beware of feeling 'at home' in this world, we cannot ignore the territory through which we travel. The arctic explorer who goes equipped with sandals, cotton shorts, sun hat and an extensive knowledge of Arabic does not travel very far.

## Today's Situation

Our situation in Scotland today is very different from that of the covenanters. There is now little danger of any of us being burnt at the stake for our faith. Certainly evangelicals can be scorned or laughed at both inside and outside the church. Being portrayed as eccentrics in soap operas, however, hardly constitutes persecution for the sake of

Christ.

Today the encounter is often a confrontation on the part of the world. Many people look at the church and, through the spectacles of folk memory, perceive a rigid adherence to dogma and consequently reject utterly such an approach to life. Whether or not they are accurate in such a perception of the church does not alter its impact on their assessments.

More often the encounter is an accommodation by the church to the way of the world. An attempt to speak the gospel in terms understandable to the world too quickly changes into an attempt to make the gospel acceptable to the world. Present day responses to proclaiming the gospel in the midst of our changing cultural situation vary greatly. The Bishop of Edinburgh proposes an ethical system freed from the constraints of Christ! By contrast, one Highland congregation retains a collection of spare hats for female tourists who might attend services without appropriate headgear. The bishop wishes to conform to the standards of chattering class political correctness; the Highland congregation-in what they see as principled adherence to biblical revelation-reverts to mid-Victorian evangelicalism. Both are attempting to get the church to conform to the cultural norms of the particular sector of society with which they most closely identify.

## Can We Really See Through Those Windows?

It has been said that we are living today at a time of seismic change in the way that people think and perceive the world around them. The argument is that, having left Enlightenment categories behind us, we are moving forward into a postmodern future which will be much more fluid. We are at present in the period of transition which gives us greater opportunity to choose what to discard from the past and what to take advantage of in the future. To do this we must be realistic about our present situation.

The church which is the creation of the God who is always doing a new thing and whose head is the Christ who shocked the religious leaders of his day, the church which is to be led by the Holy Spirit who disturbs and moves us on, this church is resistant to change to an extraordinary degree. Two of the principal reasons for this are the effect of our doctrine and the effect of our ecclesiastical culture.

## The Effect of Doctrine

Doctrine emerges as a response to two sets of inputs from the reality situation confronting the church: first, the internal contribution of the codified standards — Scripture, confessions and tradition; and second, the external input of cultural changes — the Renaissance, Enlightenment, modernism, existentialism, postmodernism etc. Within this fluid situation the church develops its response, which for certain personalities takes the weight off the mind and emotions and instead places the burden on memory.

***Doctrine helps weld together a disparate bunch of individuals into a corporate entity which functions in a reasonably cohesive manner***

### Resistance to change

Once learned, the dogmas of the church become received wisdom which leaves the limited capacity of conscious experience gratefully free to deal with more pressing problems less amenable to codification. Theology becomes an automatic response, as much a means of identifying who is on our side as a tool to help us explore revelation. Like any compulsive symptoms, ritual and dogma place themselves so far beyond reasoned thought that they create their own resistance to change and the acceptance of fresh approaches.

Doctrine has a sociologically useful and necessary function in the church for the same reasons that habit and tradition function usefully in society. Doctrine helps weld together a disparate bunch of individuals into a corporate entity which functions in a reasonably cohesive manner. This is a positive function of doctrine which should be recognised and valued.

### Shield against reality

We should not blind ourselves to the negative pay off—the tendency for means to become ends. What was initiated as a functionally useful exploration of the encounter between revelation and experience becomes a stylised pattern into which succeeding generations are shoehorned. In Scotland we have extremist Presbyterians for whom theological exploration ceased in 1647 with the Westminster Assembly.

For such Christians, theology ceases to be a means of creatively encountering and exploring the culture surrounding us; instead theology be-

comes a shield against reality, a way of denying the uncomfortable and dangerous world which threatens outside the church. The Lordship of Christ is denied when he is only allowed to speak to our situation in the accents of King James.

## The Effect of Ecclesiastical Culture

Microsoft is the biggest profit making company on the face of the planet today. Their operating system Windows functions in more than 90% of PCs, and Bill Gates and his shareholders don't know what to do with their ever increasing personal fortunes. Yet few people would actually claim that Windows was the best operating system around.

### Windows 98

It has built in redundancies to a stupefying level, it crashes at an unacceptable rate and everyone is overly familiar with error messages. No one is particularly happy with Windows, yet the juggernaut that is Microsoft seems to roll on relentlessly.

The Microsoft operation, although supposedly at the cutting edge of technological advance, is in fact a typical old-fashioned industrial giant controlled by an Enlightenment mindset. The pyramid structure which shaped turn of the century industrial giants like US Steel and General Motors is the same structure which today controls Microsoft. The logos may be snazzier, the presentations more colourful, the lip service to the latest trends and management techniques more obvious, but the same corporate dynamic which moved Andrew Carnegie moves Bill Gates.

### Christ rarely walks the shop floor

When we come to our ecclesiastical culture, that is the denominational and congregational structures we employ, we find that it doesn't really matter what the preferred church polity is, the results are the same at denominational and congregational level. In practice we live and work with an industrial ecclesiology in which Christ is raised so high that he

rarely walks the shop floor.

The western church has been absorbed by the industrial world around us. Church today is often just modern western humanity given a quick baptism. Unfortunately such 'sprinklings' do not transform us, for we are not 'immersed'!

Our way of being the church is little different from our way of running our businesses. Ministers have become professional clergy, the corporate middle management able to apply modern business methods as they run the local franchises of the denominational chain. The activity of the 'professional' and 'specialised' Christian has become identified with the life of the church.

### A professional corps of officials

Specialisation contributes to stratification and categorisation of employees and makes change within the system increasing difficult, with one exception—it is always possible to make things more complex.<sup>1</sup>

The complication of structures, courts, committees, the removal of power ever further up the organisational structure, the separation of the people from the act of worship except as consumers, all this has complicated enormously the sim-

are industrial scale bureaucracies.

What such bureaucracies don't realise is that this organisational ethos is on the way to extinction. The days of denominational imperialism are over. Unfortunately our soon to be extinct denominational structures are like dinosaurs: the body is dead but the message hasn't quite reached the head yet. In denominational headquarters throughout the west we find increasingly bewildered behemoths plaintively bellowing to each other over swamps of committee minutes and reports while the new ice age relentlessly approaches.

### More admirals than ships

In the meantime as the historic denominations in the UK shrink in numbers, the bureaucracy grows. The one growth area in my own denomination (Church of Scotland) is central staffing. In 1956 with 1.32 million members and 2,080 serving ministers, the position of Principal Clerk to the General Assembly was a part time post held by a parish minister. Now that Church has halved in membership and has only 1,149 serving ministers, the Principal Clerkship is a full time job with a full time Depute Clerk, both ordained ministers, and an office of four full time staff.

Like the Royal Navy which now has more admirals than warships, the Church of Scotland has an ever expanding central bureaucracy and an ever shrinking presence in the world. (Perhaps this journal should give a prize to the first person to extrapolate from these figures and work out the date when more than 50% of Church of Scotland members will be employed in the church offices!)

Unless we ask uncomfortable questions, such as 'In what way does the Lordship of Christ exist in reality within our denominational structures?' we are as guilty as the German Christians of the 1930's of adopting the (Nazi) culture of their society. This question must also be asked in relation to our congregations and the way we personally live out our obedience to Christ.

### A cheer for cracked windows

As well as its distortions, this industrial

## *In what way does the Lordship of Christ exist in reality within our denominational structures?*

plicity of the church and has vitiated the dynamism of the Spirit filled body of believers. Despite what we preach and teach, the worshipping people of God learn from our practices that they exist to serve — and ensure the survival of — a bureaucratic institution.

The Encyclopaedia Britannica III describes bureaucracy as 'a professional corps of officials organised in a pyramidal hierarchy and functioning under impersonal, uniform rules and procedures'. Our denominational structures

model, which the church has adopted almost wholesale, has brought many of the same type of benefits to the church that it has brought to business; benefits such as territorial coverage, expansion in mission, more efficient use of shared resources, theological training of great numbers to meet the population expansion of the industrial age.

We should not be blind to the benefits of scale that an industrial based approach to being the church has brought. Neither should we blindly accept this as the way things are and always should be. Therefore, we should give one cheer for our cracked windows—but let it be a muted one.

## **The Fat Penguin Meets Paul**

Linus Torvalds is a student in his early twenties who was recently given an honorary doctorate by the School of Mathematics and Science of Stockholm University. While still an undergraduate, Torvalds had developed the Unix computer operating system into a more compact and interactive operating system called Linux, whose logo is a fat penguin. Linux is faster, more reliable, easier to use and more fun than Windows. What is more it is free.

### **An interactive organism**

There is no industrial pyramid associated with and feeding off Linux, rather there is a community of users. If you use Linux and have a problem there is no expensive help line; instead you email other users and the community gets involved in helping sort the problem. In the same way, if you think of a possible development of the system you do not have to worry about Microsoft's notorious legal department. Any new development is floated within the community, examined by fellow users, the bugs ironed out and, if useful, gradually adopted. Linux is an interactive organism rather than an organisation. Without rigid structures the leadership within the organism emerges from among those who are active and who earn the esteem of their fellow parti-

pants by their proven ability.

Linux is a forerunner of the culture in which we are going to be operating. This type of technology is profoundly postmodern in its approach and application. It also provides us with a structural model of a future society emerging from our presently developing culture which is profoundly hopeful for the church.

### **Healthy church life**

This is something which reflects many of the aspects of healthy church life as seen in such passages as I Corinthians 12. There we have an interactive fellowship of participants all playing their special part according to their particular gifts, all accorded value and all dependent upon the presence of the living Lord. There is no trace of ecclesiastical structure or of offices, just of believers and functions.

As we look at the New Testament church and examine our own needs and hopes as Christians and church leaders, we must ask which model appears more biblical and therefore more useful, the cracked window or the fat penguin? Interaction with which way of thinking is liable to enable us to draw closer to the biblical picture of the church and provide a point of contact with today's unbelieving world? Remember that what we do is a reflection and outworking of both what we think and how we think.

***Christianity has been so appallingly presented over the past fifty or so years that very few people really know what it is***

## **Tomorrow's Church**

### *Truth: The words Or The Word?*

The term 'postmodern' is one of those lovely terms which means just whatever we want it to mean. It has reached almost totemic proportions. Whenever anything in society or the church goes wrong, good evangelicals immediately decide that this is an evidence of the outworking of postmodernism in soci-

ety or church. We shake our heads, mutter our tut tuts and try to get back to business as usual. Hopefully business will never be usual again.

### **Adding to a stock of biblical facts**

Truth in the Enlightenment mindset is not so much a concept to be encountered as an entity ‘out there’ to be appropriated and added to our stock of factoids. We value genuine knowledge which is objectively true. This means that its status does not depend on the testimony of any individual or group. The whole point of saying something is objectively true is to say that anyone thinking logically and unhindered by prejudice would come to the same conclusion. The fact that we don’t think logically and are always hindered by prejudice is ignored.

We should remind ourselves that the Enlightenment concept of objective truth is merely a model of knowledge and that for most of the history of the church we have done without such a concept of truth.

This ‘objective’ approach to truth has shaped our way of being the church and of presenting the gospel for several centuries—and still does. How many sermons do we hear (or preach ourselves) by ‘expository ministries’ which are really just spoken commentaries giving our people ‘knowledge’ construed as objective information or truth without connection or application and therefore without real understanding or real truth? All we have done is add to the stock of biblical facts in the memories of our people.

Postmodernism can free us from the illusion that knowledge is in and of itself valuable. The value of knowledge is proportional to its applicability.

### **The plausibility question**

In the world in which we are going to be increasingly operating our apologetic challenge is going to change radically. At one time we were asked the credibility question, today we are being asked the plausibility question. The Enlightenment mindset asks the credibility question; ‘Is this Christian truth claim

backed up by rational evidence such that I can intellectually accept it as credible?’ Today the post modern unbeliever asks the plausibility question; ‘When I compare what these Christians say about Jesus bringing freedom, joy and power with the evidence of the life of the church, can I accept what they say as plausible?’

Peter Cotterell, Principal of London Bible College, wrote, ‘Christianity has been so appallingly presented over the past fifty or so years that very few people really know what it is.’<sup>2</sup> The most potent argument against the Christian truth claim today is the church, not because we don’t speak true words about the Lordship of Christ but because we don’t witness to the truth of the Lordship of Christ the living Word in our congregational lives.

### **A Community of Truth**

The abuse of the doctrinal distinction between the church visible and invisible has done untold harm to the church: it is used as a ‘get-out’ clause when anything goes wrong. In a postmodern culture we are no longer allowed to escape the integral connection between the truth and the community who claim the truth. We are no longer able to evade the Lordship of the living Word by appeals to written words as our supreme rule in faith and life. The living Word must be embodied in a visible fashion.

### **Local Fellowships**

In the church in the postmodern world we will see the emergence of smaller groupings of Christians in interactive fellowships which, however messily they may do so, attempt to embody the relationships of which the New Testament speaks. These groupings will embody a high degree of commitment to the Lordship of Christ and to the other members of the group as Christians work out their faith together. Within our congregations the central act of worship will take the form of celebration and praise whilst the real teaching and learning will go on in smaller interactive groupings who minister to each other and together explore what it means to be Christ’s.

At the same time these fellowships will also be more fluid than we are used to, members staying within one fellowship for a time while it meets the needs of their particular stage in the Christian life, then moving on as they move on spiritually. The believer and her developing relationship with God will be more important than ecclesiastical structures.

### **Membership**

The practice of church membership which we know today will largely disappear. This in itself will be no bad thing. As presently practiced, church membership militates against conversion. At a certain age or prior to one of the cultural rites of passage, people pass through a series of hurdles which entitle them to think that having done what was required by the organisation they have arrived at the goal. Commitment will be focused on commitment to the Lord and to a particular local group of the Lord’s people. Denominational affiliation will be largely an irrelevance.

### **Worship**

A release from the bondage of the Enlightenment might return us to an appreciation of worship as an embodiment of the adoration of the whole body of God’s people. Soren Kierkegaard points us to the image of the theatre when he writes that in worship the people are the actors, the worship leaders are the prompters and God is the audience. In our worship today too often the worship leaders are the actors, the congregation is the audience and God is addressed as a somewhat remote backer whom we hope we can interest in funding our next unlikely performance.

### **Doctrine**

The articulation of doctrine never stands still. The theology of the church does not grow and develop in a vacuum divorced from and untainted by the world in which we live. If it did it would be useless to a living church. Our doctrine must be a product of the interaction between special revelation and our historical situation. In this transitional period we have an opportunity to look

afresh at our doctrine, particularly that of the church, and strip away the Enlightenment cultural chaff in order to retain, cherish and plant the eternal wheat so that it may bear fruit once again.

The task facing us is that of deconstructing our doctrine by paring away the accretions of the past and listening anew to how our Lord speaks to his church. Our situation is one in which we can engage in the creative exploration and application of the Lordship of Christ in our new cultural setting so that the living people of God are gathered at the feet of their living Lord. Such deconstruction demands a strong enough faith in Christ and his Word to enable us to look again at what we believe, strip away the accretions of centuries, and return as a body of people who offer genuine obedience to the One we call our Lord.

## *Endnotes*

1 Laurence J Peter, *The Peter Pyramid*, London, 1986, pp.43,44.

2 Peter Cotterell, *Small Groups, Big Groups*, Eastbourne, 1985, p.17.

Rutherford House wishes to express its sincere congratulations to Dr David F Wright, the Chairman of the Board of Trustees who has been appointed to **Personal Chair of Historical Theology** at New College, Edinburgh.

# 8th Edinburgh Dogmatics Conference

## September 1999



From left: Dr Kenneth Brownell, Dr Mike Pearse, Rev David Searle,  
Prof David Wright, Dr John McPake

The Edinburgh Dogmatics Conferences are intended for theological teachers or academics in other disciplines. Also welcome are research students and ministers and laypersons with a serious theological interest. Divinity students may attend but a letter of commendation from a theological teacher in the faculty in which they are studying must accompany their application.

Around 70 people registered for this biennial conference held in Rutherford House.

The subject was 'Truth and Tolerance: Christian Doctrine in a post-Christian society'.

The calibre of the speakers and the relevance of the subjects to the task of ministry and mission was self-evident—indeed the conference proved to be most stimulating.



Prof Tom Torrance and Prof Henri Blocher

# The Trial & Triumph of Faith

**Samuel Rutherford**

[First published 1646]

## The 2nd sermon of 27 on the Syrophoenician Woman

*And he went into a house, and would that no man should know it.*

### **Christ took on himself a human will**

We begin by noticing there are two wills in Christ. First there is this will, according to which it is said, he ‘would that no man should know it’. This was his human will, according to which the Lord Jesus was a man as we are, yet without sin. His human will was not always necessarily fulfilled. Over against that was also his divine will which was backed with omnipotence. It can never be resisted. It overcomes all, and can be resisted by none.

### **Christ took a human will to stoop to God in all things**

Consider then what a Christ we have, one who as God has a standing will that cannot fail (Isa.14:24). I will do all my pleasure... I have purposed it, I will also do it (Isa.46:10f.) His pleasure and his

work are commensurable (Ps.135:6; Ps.115:3). Nevertheless, remember that Christ took a human will to stoop to God in all things. Yet this Lord did stoop so low as to take to himself man’s will to submit to God and Law. And see how Christ for our instruction is content that God should break his will and submit it to divine providence. Oh, so little and low as great Jesus Christ is, all is come to this, O my Father, let this this cup pass from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt (Matt.26:39).

Yet Christ and his Father had but one will between them both: I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me (John 5:30; cf. Rom.15:3, For even Christ pleased not himself) It is a sign of conformity with Christ, when we have a will so mortified that it lies level with God’s providence. Aaron’s sons are killed, and that by God immediately from heaven with fire, a judgement very hell-like (Lev.10:1-3), but we read, And Aaron held his peace. His was also a will lying

in the dust at God’s feet. It behoves me to be able to say, ‘I belong to him. Should his will enact to throw me in hell, he shall still have my vote!’ Such submission is very like the mother-rule of all sanctified wills, even like Christ’s pliable will.

### **The strength of the corrupt will**

There was no iron sinew in Christ’s will; it was easily broken. Just the top of God’s finger with one touch broke Christ’s will: Lo I come to do thy will, O God (Heb.10:9). Oh, but there is a hard stone in our will. The stony heart is the stony will. Hell cannot break the rock, the adamant or the flint in our will. Nay, but we will have a King (1Sam.8:19) — whether it is God’s will or not! Jeremiah tells us that God’s will stands in the people’s way, bidding them return, but they answer: There is no hope: but we will walk after our own devices (Jer.18:12). Hell, vengeance, omnipotence all crossed Pharaoh’s will, but it would neither bow nor break. But the Lord

hardened Pharaoh's heart, so that he would not let the children of Israel go (Ex.10:20).

### **Two aspects of our will**

Notice two aspects our will: first, the natural frame and constitution of it. The will of angels and of sinless Adam was not essentially good, otherwise angels could never have turned into devils. Therefore the constitution of the will needs supervenient goodness and confirming grace, even when the will is at its best. Grace! Grace now is the only oil to our wheels. Christ has taken the castle, both its inner defences and its outer fortifications,<sup>1</sup> when he has taken the will, that proudest enemy Christ has outside of hell. When Saul of Tarsus surrendered his will, he surrendered his weapon. This is mortification, when Christ runs away with your will. Christ was like a man who did not have a man's will. So it was with Saul: Trembling and astonished, he said, Lord what will thou have me to do? (Acts 9:6). It is good when the Lord tramples upon Ephraim's fair neck (Hos.10:11).

### **The necessity of renewing the will**

Notice second, the goodness within the will. There is no goodness in our will now, but what it has from grace. To turn the will from evil to good is no more nature's work than we can turn the wind from the east to the west. When the wheels of the clock are broken and rusted, it cannot go. When the bird's wing is broken, it cannot fly. When there is a stone in the spring of the lock,<sup>2</sup> the key cannot open the door. Christ must oil the wheels of our disordered will, and heal them, and remove the stone, and infuse grace—which is as the wings to the bird. Unless he does this the motions of the will are all hell-ward.

But he could not be hid, for a certain woman, etc. Christ sometimes would be hidden, because his spirit is very different to the people's superficial enthusiasm,<sup>3</sup> and their 'Hosannas'. Their's is a spirit of straw, naughty and base, that is burnt up with that which

hindered Themistocles from sleeping.<sup>4</sup> 'Honour me before the people', was cold comfort to Saul when the prophet told him God had rejected him.

### **God hides himself, but faith finds him**

First, learn Christ did not desire to be hidden from this woman; he was seeking her, and yet he fled from her. In this Christ flees in such a way as would gladly be pursued. Second, learn that faith finds Christ out when he is hid: Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself. Yet faith sees God under his mask, and through the cloud, and therefore faith adds, O God of Israel, the Saviour (Isa.45:15). You hid yourself, O God, from Israel, but Israel finds you (Isa.45:17). Israel shall be saved in the Lord, with an everlasting salvation. God casts a cloud of anger about himself, he makes darkness his pavillion, and will not look out; yet Job saw God, and found him out many hundred miles: Yet in my flesh I shall see God (Job 19:26).

Third, reason, sense, nay, even angels seeing Christ between two thieves, dying and going out of the world bleeding to death, naked, forsaken of friend and lover, may wonder and say; O Lord, what dost thou here? Nevertheless the faith of the thief found him there as a king who had the keys of paradise, and he said in faith, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom (Luke 23:42).

Fourth, faith sees him as a witness and a record in heaven. Even when God cleaveth Job's reins asunder, and poureth out his gall upon the ground (Job 16:13; cf. vs.19,20). Believe then that Christ looks crossly<sup>5</sup> that he may kiss, that he cuts that he may cure, that he makes the grave of the living believers before their eyes, and has no mind to bury them alive. He breathes the smoke and the heat of the furnace of hell on the soul, when peace, grace and heaven is in his heart. He breaks the hollow of Jacob's thigh, so that he must go limping all his days, yet it is his purpose to bless him. Whereas we should walk by faith, even in our spiritual lives we tend to walk by feeling and sense.

### We trust the dispensation<sup>6</sup> of God, not Scripture nor a rule of faith

We have two errors in our faith.

1. We do not make the word of promise the rule of our faith, but only God's dispensation. Now God's dispensation is spotless, innocent and white. Yet it is not Scripture to me, nor is the word of God, for all that dispensation and providence seem to speak to me. Ram-horns do not speak of taking of towns in an ordinary providence, in the same way as does a host of fighting men with spear and shield. Being killed all the day long and counted as sheep for the slaughter does not say to me that God's people are more than conquerors through him that loved us (Rom.8:36,37).

Our faith in reference to dispensation is to do two things. First, to believe in general even though God's dispensation be rough, stormy, black — for Christ is fair, sweet, gracious and even hell and death are servants to God's dispensation toward his children. Abraham must kill Isaac, yet in Isaac as in the promised seed, all the nations of the earth are blessed. Israel is foiled, and falls before the men of Ai, yet Israel shall be saved by the Lord. Judah shall go into captivity, but the dead bones shall live again. Read therefore the promise in general, and see it engraved upon the dispensation of God. Garments are rolled in blood in Scotland and England. The wheels of Christ's chariot, in this Reformation, go with a slow pace. The Prince is averse to peace, many worthies are killed, a foreign nation comes against us. Yet, all works for the best to those that love God.

Second, hope bids us to await the Lord's event. We see God's work, it comes to our senses, but the event that God brings out of his work, is concealed underground. Dispensation is as a woman travailing in birth, and crying out for pain, but she shall be delivered of two men children: mercy to the people of God on the one hand, and justice to Babylon on the other. Therefore continue to wait until the woman gives birth, even though just now you do not see the two children.

### We trust possession of Christ by sense, more than we do right and Law through faith

2. This is the second error in our faith: we trust possession on our part, more than Law and the fidelity of the promise on God's part. Feeling is of more credit to us than faith, sense is surer to us than the word of faith. Many weak ones do not believe life eternal because they do not feel it. Heaven is a thing unseen, and when they find no consolation and comfort, they are disquieted.

If we knew that believing is a bargaining and a buying, we should see the weakness of many. Should a man buy a field of land, and refuse to count out<sup>7</sup> the money, except the seller should lay all the ridges, acres, meadows, and mountains on the buyer's shoulders, that he might carry them home to this house, he should be incredulously unjust. If any should buy a ship, and think it no bargain at all, except he might carry away the ship on his back, should not this make him a ridiculous merchant? God's Law offaith, Christ's completed<sup>8</sup> atonement, is better and surer than your feeling. All that sense and comfort says is not Canonical Scripture. It is adultery to seek a sign; because we cannot rest on our h u s b a n d ' s [ C h r i s t ' s ] w o r d .

### Endnotes

1 original: 'its in-works and out-works'

2 original: 'a stone in the sprent and in-work of the lock'

3 original: 'he hath a spirit above the people's windy air'

4 Themistocles was an Athenian politician who mastered-mind the Greek defence against Persian attacks by Xerxes I in the 480s BC. After succeeding in routing the Persians, he was ostracised by the Athenians and then accused of complicity in intrigues with Persians.

5 original: 'glowneth'

6 By 'dispensation' is meant 'God's providential ordering or arrangement of events'

7 orginal: 'tell down'

8 original: 'concluded'

# Initiation and Nurture

**Gordon R Palmer,  
Slateford Longstone Parish Church, Edinburgh**

This article must not in any be regarded as the reflections of a successful practitioner in the field of initiation and nurture of recent Christians. Rather it is a review of some recent material on the subject. I am writing in the hope that some may consider reviewing their approach and practice. Furthermore, I am not attempting to write a theology of Christian initiation—for example of baptism, conversion, or church membership and the inter-relationship of these three. I am simply looking at material aimed at leading people to faith and bringing them further on in the Christian life. There is much published material available in this area. However, my concern here is not so much what course we may use but rather the overall approach we take.

The subject of church membership is of huge importance. We need look no further than Jesus' very clear words at the end of Matthew's gospel to see a very central place given to discipling. What I want to consider is how that command is to be fulfilled as we seek to call people to follow Jesus Christ and then how we nurture those who respond in repentance and faith in order that their relationship with God is deepened and strengthened.

### **Distaste and suspicion**

Despite the Lord's very clear words and the huge difference he makes to life both

now and for eternity, discipling is not something that is always explicit in church life and activities. In my own denomination (Church of Scotland), it can even be regarded with distaste and suspicion. Last year at an event intended to prepare congregations for the five-yearly appraisal by Presbytery, we were put into small groups and asked what we thought were the features of a healthy congregation. The group from my own congregation put 'people becoming Christians' at the top of their list. Re-

*We need look no further than Jesus' very clear words at the end of Matthew's gospel to see a very central place given to discipling*

porting back, they were put very much on the defensive for some at that meeting were antagonistic while others simply did not know what we meant.

Each year at presbyteries and at our General Assembly, statistics are presented which show vast numerical decline, yet

these are scarcely commented on. We don't want to ask too hard what we are doing and why so little impression is being made. Even in many congregations with an explicitly evangelical ethos there is often more concern over whether there is a Sunday evening service than whether there is an effective way for people to discover the basics of Christian faith and living.

### **Cautious enquirers and committed disciples**

The importance and urgency of the situation has become more marked due to the changes going on around us. William Storrar has written cogently on how over the past 50 years Scotland has moved from 'modernity' to 'post-modernity' and how the church fitted in well in the 'modern' society 'as one of the respected institutions that held society together. You left school, got a job and went to the minister's new communicants class. The expectations and social life of family and community acted as the recruiting sergeant for the Church of Scotland's mass membership.'<sup>1</sup> But the church does not fit in so well with the post-modern society. Storrar continued, 'What has changed over the last 50 years is that people no longer feel the need to belong to the Church or any mass-membership institution to embody their beliefs and values. Such post-modern people are

more interested in expressing their religious beliefs through a pick'n'mix of anything from yoga classes to single-issues campaigning groups.' He asks, 'Will we welcome and affirm a range of new, post-modern adherents who may want to attend worship from time to time, or become involved in some specific area of church life, without taking up membership in the traditional sense?... perhaps we need to read the gospels again, and remember their picture of those around Jesus, from the swirling crowds to the cautious inquirers and the committed disciples.'

between the experience of those coming gradually and those having what seems a single episode is that the latter tend to be much more overtly religious' (evangelistic events, the Bible, preaching). 'Conversely the "human" factors-friendship, the birth of children etc, had less effect' (p.32).

iii. 'Prayer is such a common experience, even among those who have no practice of churchgoing that the ways in which we can evangelise by helping people with their prayer life needs to be explored' (p.35).

iv. factors in coming to faith:

### **Two Recent Studies**

1 *Finding Faith Today: How Does It Happen?* by John Finney (published 1992). Finney conducted an investigation in England of 511 young people over 16 years old who had recently publicly professed faith (1990-91) in congregations of varying types and social settings. Finney's work has been widely quoted, being the most substantial information seeking exercise in this area in the past 20 years.

A number of observations and findings which seem especially relevant to our subject are given below:

i. Relationships rather than content of belief were stressed by participants. 'People look for help in discovering a relationship with God, maintaining it in good repair, and thinking through the difference which it should make in their relationships with others' (p.21). 'To belong to a group of friends who were Christians was important. For most people the corporate life of the church is a vital element in the process of becoming a Christian and for about a quarter it is the vital factor. Forms of evangelism which fail to recognise this are doomed' (p.43).

ii. Coming to faith is more often a gradual process than a sudden event. 'The gradual process is the way in which the majority of people discover God and the average time taken is about four years: models of evangelism which can help people along the pathway are needed' (p.25). 'The main difference

#### **Main factors (on a scale of 1 to 30)**

Male = M Female = F

Spouse/partner	M 22	F 5
Children	M 3	F 13
Parents	M 7	F 5
Other family	M 1	F 1
Christian friends	M 15	F 24
Christian lay person	M 4	F 4
Church's activities	M 3	F 8
Dream/vision	M 3	F 3
Minister	M 16	F 17
Evangelistic event	M 3	F 5
Bible	M 7	F 5
Books/music/drama	M 4	F 2
Christian TV/radio	M 0	F 0
Other	M 13	F 9

#### **Supporting factors (scale of 1 to 50)**

Spouse/partner	M 19	F 14
Children	M 9	F 18
Parents	M 13	F 12
Other family	M 9	F 12
Christian friends	M 39	F 40
Christian lay person	M 15	F 9
Church's activities	M 21	F 43
Dream/vision	M 4	F 2
Minister	M 43	F 45
Evangelistic event	M 15	F 12
Books/music/drama	M 19	F 15
Christian TV/radio	M 7	F 5
Other	M 5	F 6

v. While the confirmation class or its equivalent were very much appreciated, little else was on offer afterwards. 'It may be a matter of some concern that despite the very high level of satisfaction which we shall find is recorded for the preparation phase, a consider-

able number now had no ongoing support apart from Sunday worship (p.74). Courses which had follow-up meetings after the public profession scored very highly on the "helpful" scale' (p.103).

2. *Gone But Not Forgotten: Church Leaving And Returning* by Philip Richter and Leslie J. Francis.

Between 1995 and 1997 the authors conducted 27 in-depth interviews with a range of people who had left either an Anglican or Roman Catholic or Methodist or 'New Church' congregations. During autumn 1996 they conducted a postal survey, getting over 800 replies, and a similar number of telephone interviews. The book was published in 1997.

In an attempt to make sense of church leaving, *Gone But Not Forgotten* divided the discussion of the causes for leaving into eight broad categories: loss of faith; changing social values; stages of faith development (people growing in faith at different paces); changes and chances in the pattern of life; upbringing; too high a commitment asked for; churches not meeting expectations; broken relationships and conflict.

At the conclusion the following summary is offered: 'churches are most likely to retain their members and encourage leavers to return when they:

i. Avoid pigeonholing people into tidy membership categories. The authors quote with approval a 1996 Anglican report *Youth A Part* which advocates what it calls a "centred set" approach to Christian belonging. Rather than being concerned with the church's boundaries and keeping out those who do not conform to accepted standards of belief and behaviour or fail to pull their weight, the "centred set" model focused instead on the *centre* of the church, Jesus Christ. So long as people are moving towards the centre then they can be said to belong' (p.143).

ii. Notice and react sensitively when people are leaving.

iii. Avoid blowing out any embers of faith.

iv. Meet and respect people where they are culturally.

v. Meet and respect people where they are spiritually. 'The church that is best at

retaining its members is one that presupposes that individuals grow in faith, in their own time and in their own way' (p.152).

vi. Help people to grow in their faith. 'It is a worthwhile exercise for churches to stand back occasionally from their busy programmes and to ask whether they are genuinely taking account of people's different faith journeys' (p.154).

vii. Offer practical support as people cope with life's changes and chances.  
viii. Encourage parents in their upbringing of children.

ix. Offer people a gospel worth investing in. 'One might expect, as a general

e) The general health and well-being of a congregation is a vital part of missionary effectiveness.

f) People are used to a pick'n'mix approach (in a world where the consumer is sovereign), and will bring these attitudes with them when they are first in contact with a congregation.

g) Follow on and follow up work after membership classes is greatly appreciated and vitally important.

## Two Approaches

Both Finney's and Richter/Francis' work (and much else that has been

**'It is a worthwhile exercise for churches to stand back occasionally from their busy programmes and to ask whether they are genuinely taking account of people's different faith journeys'**

rule, that the more the cost of belonging to a church is increased, the greater tendency there will be for people to drop out... researchers have discovered that it is churches that ask too little of their members that are most likely to have declining membership' (p.93).

x. Authentically embody the gospel and offer people a sense of true community.'

§

From these studies we should note the following:

a) Coming to faith is not usually instant, and takes place at a different pace for different people.

b) Allowing people to be part of church life while they are sorting things out — 'journeying towards the centre' — is important, rather than asking them to make one big jump.

c) For many people a sense of belonging comes along with or even before assurance of believing.

d) People are looking not just for information about the Christian faith but a deeper awareness of God, closer fellowship, and help to make connections between faith and daily life.

done), suggest that the approach many congregations used when we lived in a more stable, 'modern' society will simply not work in the post-modern context of today. A membership class geared implicitly if not explicitly to people at a similar stage of life, which has a main aim of imparting information, but which is neither fostering community or spiritual growth (e.g. in prayer life), nor is followed up, nor is integral to the rest of church life, will simply not have the desired effect of bringing people to faith and grounding them in Christian discipleship. In this section we look at two approaches, one from England and one from USA, where the twin aims of Christian initiation and nurture shape the rest of church life, and are seen as a whole of life and a vital component of the whole church's *raison d'être*, and are open to beginning where people are and taking them along at their pace.

### *Emmaus: The Way of Faith*

This is a course designed to welcome people into the Christian faith and the

life of the Church. It originated in a parish in the Diocese of Wakefield, and represents the practical outworking of the Church of England's *On The Way* report on the catechumenate. All five of its authors are Anglicans. However it claims to have been produced to be used by any denomination.

### The three stages:

1. **Contact** is the first stage because we cannot simply sit and wait for people to come to us but must turn our focus outward, venturing beyond our own boundaries and listening to those around us. 'This is the pattern Jesus set and calls us to follow' (Introduction - p.1).

2. **Nurture**, the second stage, provides material we might associate with enquirers or membership classes or Christian Basics groups. It is in three parts: *What Christians Believe; How Christians Grow; and Living The Christian Life*. While Emmaus owes much to the catechumenate model which often takes a more open-ended approach to syllabus and instruction, the material has a more systematic approach. 'We believe that the appropriate point for letting the enquirer set the agenda completely is first contact. After this, as enquirers decide to explore more, they need a firm foundation in the basics of the faith before they are really able to develop a dialogue with it' (Introduction p.3).

There are two features to highlight here: *First*, the use of sponsors. Enquirers should have someone 'journey' with them as they explore, even if only journeying with them by praying for them during the course. It could also include a liturgical role (see below), coming to group meetings together, befriending.

*Second*, services. Services are suggested to mark the different stages of the 'journey'. They enable the whole congregation to make a commitment to

those on the journey and confirm the public character of Christian commitment in a world which wants to reduce it to a private option. They also take the whole issue of people coming to faith, beginning their discipleship, out of the backwaters into the forefront of congregational life. The suggestions are for a service of welcome, of dedication, of renewal (especially for those baptised and maybe even church members), of commitment to discipleship (for those about to embark on the growth courses).

3. **Growth** is the third stage. It emphasises formation rather than information. 'If the bottleneck is the stunted growth of so many churchgoing Christians, then the active discipling of all who come to faith will have a direct and dramatic effect on our mission to the world.' (Introduction p.8) The growth material consists of 13 short courses of between four and six weeks each. The important point is that growth does not stop. Commitment leads somewhere, and wherever possible it is focused outwards in mission.

### The Principles

A regular running programme is envisaged starting small, running one nurture group a year. There are four principles behind the model.

First, *entry into faith is a process of discovery*. The emphasis is on discovery though an element of 'telling' is needed. More important is that people walk together.

Second, *the process is best practised as an accompanied journey*. The belief is that initiation takes place not so much through open notebooks but open lives. There should be a spirit of mutual learning, 'a two-way partnership and not a one-way production line' (Introduction p.18).

Third, *the process must affect our whole*

*lives*. 'We can identify a number of areas where the Gospel is intended to bring about a life changing reorientation of our lives. Seven aspects of the transformation that we can expect to find at work are listed here' (Introduction p.20).

- i. Spirituality, by which is meant how we engage with God. Having, or being given, information is not the same as knowing God. 'Our task is not just, for example, to talk about prayer, but to pray together' (p.21).
- ii. Self acceptance.
- iii. A changed character
- iv. Community.
- v. A worldview that lets our faith challenge the limitations and blind spots in the non-Christian worldview around us.
- v Lifestyle.
- vi. Mission.

Fourth, *effective initiation affects the life of the whole church*. 'Only when a church builds initiation into its way of life (and nature of operating) will it become the sort of church into which it is healthy to be initiated' (Introduction p.24). Here are some of the ways that the Emmaus material, if used to the full, is calling for a whole church participation: the various services recommended, the use of sponsors, the stress on faith as a journey, the creation of space in the life of the congregation, the practice of prayer, measuring church life against what is taught in the classes-so ensuring issues raised do not just remain explored ideas by a small group who met in the vestry for 6 or 7 weeks

The second recent study is:

*The Purpose Driven Church*

Rick Warren

Warren firmly believes that we should not be asking questions such as, 'What will make our church grow?' so much as, 'What is keeping our church from growing?' Since the church is a living organism, it is natural for it to grow if it is healthy. One major cause of ill-health is that we are not clear enough about our purpose and not effective enough in organising ourselves around that purpose. The four critical phases to becoming 'purpose driven' are define our purposes, communicate those to every-

***we should not be asking questions such as,  
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growing?'***

one on a regular basis, *organise* around the purposes, *apply* the purposes to every part of congregational life. Outreach and incorporating new people into the fellowship are not identified as the church's sole or main purposes. Five key words are used to summarise Christ's purpose for his church:

#### **Magnify**

By 'magnify' Warren means celebrating God's presence in worship.

#### **Mission**

By 'mission' is meant communicating God's word through evangelism.

#### **Membership**

He means incorporating God's family into the fellowship.

#### **Maturity**

The emphasis is on educating God's people through discipleship.

#### **Ministry**

All believers are to demonstrate God's love through service.

These purposes are then spelt out in many ways, personalised for people, reviewed regularly, restated regularly. The organising of church life around them is in part aided by identifying five circles of commitment:

- i. Community (those in the neighbourhood or in contact with members).
- ii. Crowd (that is, attenders).
- iii. Congregation (that is, those who are members).
- iv. Committed (those active in discipleship).
- v. Core (those committed to ministering to others).

He believes different approaches are needed for different people, starting where they are but seeking to move them on to the next stage. There are classes to move people on to commitment in membership, then maturity, then ministry, then missions.

#### **The Life Development Process**

A new member gets to first base by completing the appropriate class and committing himself to Saddleback's membership covenant. He then arrives at second base after completing the appropriate class and committing himself to a spiritual growth covenant. He makes it to third base by completing the next appropriate class and committing him-

self to serve in a ministry of the church. Finally he completes the circuit via a fourth class and a commitment to sharing his faith both at home and on mission trips. (*Purpose Driven Church* p.145) The aim is to take each person from the community who comes along, right through to being actively engaged in ministry and mission. There is a written covenant at each base that people are to sign and commit to before moving on to the next stage.

Warren believes there has to be a system and a structure to assimilate and keep the people we reach. 'A number of studies have shown that the way people join an organisation greatly influences how they function in that organisation after joining. This is true of joining a church as well. The manner in which people join your church will determine their effectiveness as members for years to come' (p.315). The membership class then sets the tone and expectation level for all else that comes. This is the time, Warren claims, to elicit strong commitment.

'Note that a *strong* class doesn't necessarily mean a *long* class. Saddleback's membership class (for base one) is only four hours long and is taught in one day, yet it produces a high level of commitment in our membership because those who take the class find out exactly what will be expected of them as members' (p.316). The focus is not on doctrine or basic spiritual growth as there are classes elsewhere for those. It is important that those who complete the membership class are made to feel that they belong. For example, there is a new member's banquet where older members pay for the meals of the new members.

But more than members, we are to seek mature members. Like the Emmaus material, great stress is laid on relation-

ships being key to growth. Being more than just knowledge, growth takes time and is not something that just happens. Warren says, 'We believe that spiritual growth begins with commitment, is a gradual process, involves developing habits, is measured by five factors [knowledge, perspective, conviction, skills, character], is stimulated by relationships, and requires participation in all five purposes of the church' (p.343).

Members then are to grow into being ministers. 'Every church needs an intentional, well-planned system for uncovering, mobilising and supporting the giftedness of its members' (p.367). A congregation should focus on empowering people not on filling positions.

#### **Conclusion**

It is time for us to ask ourselves some searching questions regarding our traditional way of proceeding with initiation and nurture. I suggest we examine our practice in three areas.

#### **Membership**

Should there be a way of 'belonging' that does not involve full membership for those who are still 'exploring', or who are on the fringe and are sympathetic and open but not yet ready for a full and explicit commitment? I am aware that 'belonging' is a word with various meanings. It may refer to traditional church membership as it has been practised for many years. On the other hand, 'belonging' may mean having a sense of being accepted by a smaller group within the fellowship. It can also mean being genuinely converted and becoming part of the Body of Christ, whether that involves 'paper membership' or not.

Should admission to membership be simply on profession of faith or ought there be other factors recognising that

***It is important that those who complete the membership class are made to feel that they belong***

Christian formation is multi-dimensional? Indeed, are we clear and do we make very explicit what are the benefits and responsibilities of membership? Is a member someone who is eligible for office, who can vote at a church meeting or is there more to it? Do the congregation and indeed (using Warren's terms) 'the crowd' know if there is and what it is?

### **Discipleship**

We must ask what happens after someone 'joins'? Have we made it clear that becoming a member is only a stage on the way? Does someone who joins our fellowship know what comes next, if anything? Are other steps and stages clearly marked out?

More, how well rounded is our discipling programme or approach? What various aspects and features of Christian living are dealt with? A survey among a group of ministers once revealed that the main help in learning

to pray for them as young Christians had come through involvement in para-church groups of various sorts. Few could say that they were initially helped through what they were shown or given in their local congregation. Could the same be said for witnessing and Bible reading?

What alternatives are there on offer to help new Christians to grow? Is filling vacant posts in the congregational structure more prominent than development of disciples?

### **Church**

How actively involved are the congregation as a whole in our initiation work? Do our congregations have a keen sense of ownership of this work? If we looked at our congregational programme, publicity and so on, how prominent or otherwise is the communicants/enquirers/seekers class that seeks to do this work?

In the Emmaus material contrast is

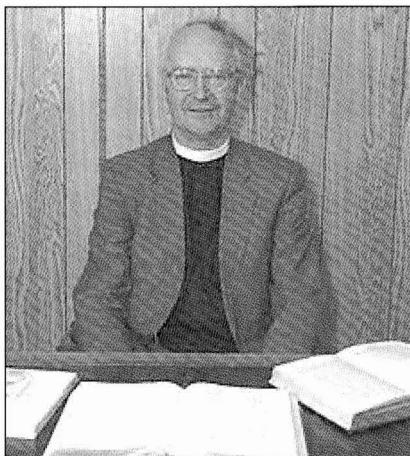
drawn between 'fuzzy' and 'fortress' churches. Fuzzy churches do not have clear boundaries: some people are becoming part of the fellowship while others may be leaving.

Sociologists talk about 'bounded' and 'centred' sets. Fortress churches demand that you believe before you can belong. This however runs contrary to the research we have reported on in this article. The research shows that people find it easier to belong to a 'fuzzy' church.

1 The Church of Scotland's monthly magazine, *Life & Work*, November 1998.

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# Ann Allen meets Howard Taylor

**In June 1998, Howard Taylor was appointed as Chaplain to Heriot Watt University, Edinburgh.**

In the late sixties along with hordes of other students Howard Taylor and I were members of the same congregation in Edinburgh. He had completed some time in Malawi teaching as a post graduate with VSO and was intent on studying theology. I followed with interest his return to Malawi as a missionary and his subsequent career and confess I was surprised when I learned last year of his appointment as Chaplain at Heriot Watt.

He was surprised to find himself there! Read on!

**Ann: Howard, I can trace a thread of involvement in theology and academia running through most of**

**your adult life. Would an academic career have attracted you had you not been called to ministry?**

Howard: Interestingly I found student life trying and exhausting for I had the unusual difficulty of not being able to listen to a lecture and take notes at the same time. As a result I learnt almost nothing from lectures. Formal university classes over six years contributed little to my learning. Set free with books, on my own in holidays and free time was an entirely different matter for I loved learning. Outside university I taught myself, from scratch, in two months New Testament Greek to such a high standard that I won the prize in the subject for the whole of Scotland! I also taught myself to speak Chichewa fluently whereas the two languages I was taught formally in the education system, French and Hebrew I did not learn properly. Any theology, philosophy and science at the frontiers I learnt from read-

ing books, books often written by the very teachers whose lectures I had attended. So it is a paradox that since I cannot learn myself from listening and notetaking that here I am loving teaching and wanting students to benefit from my own classes.

**Ann: Initially you served in the Church in Malawi. What influence did your 16 years there have on your ministry?**

Howard: Malawi is a beautiful country and I so much enjoyed my years there. It was a tremendous privilege to be part of a growing developing church. I remember at one memorable Church service baptising 200 babies. The least number I baptised was 30 babies. At that time that was not unusual so large were attendances throughout the country and such was the growth in the church. A minister needed a lot of stamina for the very lengthy services. The church in Malawi

partly answered for me the puzzle I had always had about the New Testament Church where great spiritual vitality seemingly coexisted with appalling sins and problems. That was mirrored in Church life in Malawi. It convinced me that it is only by the grace of God that the Church has survived and spread because it has, right from its inception, been beset by dreadful sins and human errors and mistakes. I was privileged to see for all these years expansion and growth which was in direct contrast to the decline in the church of the developed West.

**Ann: Was it a very difficult transition coming from that vibrant situation of growth into parish ministry in Scotland?**

Howard: It certainly isn't easy for anyone to be a pastor/minister anywhere in Scotland today because this is a secular age. I feel there is a general miasma of discouragement which I think is a major contributor to burn out. Ten years ago factions in the church were blaming each other for decline, liberals pitted against conservatives and vice versa. Now people are so ground down in a phase of weariness that there is a lack of controversy, both at Presbyteries and in the General Assembly. Ministers are tired, and debate is tired, Leaders are under enormous pressure not least where they have an office in their home and so never know what it is "to go home from work". That is a great feeling, inaccessible to most in ministry, one which only now I can appreciate and enjoy.

**Ann: Where and how then did you find encouragement and fresh enthusiasm for ministry?**

Howard: I have always done that by finding the BIG PICTURE. I read the scriptures from Genesis to Revelation every year. The more I read and the more I learn in the area of science and philosophy, the more it confirms for me the love of God at the heart of the universe focused on the cross. No other world view makes any sense of the existence

of the universe or our experience of life. My preaching week by week, and I must have preached through most of the books of the Bible in my years at St David's Knightswood, majored on the origin and destiny of humankind and all creation as seen in the cross and resurrection of Jesus. Most folk in my parish were working class. I didn't use theological or technical jargon but they responded to the love of God in Christ and the reality of heaven and hell. The reality of eternity is very important in preaching and keeping the perspective of eternity before me was a personal incentive and encouragement.

My one criticism of Alpha, good as it is, is that they fail to emphasise the relevance and dimension of eternity and of a destiny beyond this world by concentrating almost exclusively on the relevance of the gospel here and now..

**Ann: You have mentioned science and philosophy. You taught in that area in GBC while in the parish. Was that not enormously time consuming?**

Howard: Geoff Grogan invited me to teach two modules at the college 12 years ago and I am still involved. It has been enormously beneficial and has had great spinoffs for my ministry actually. It forced me to clarify my thinking, be particularly careful in my study and gave a clear focus for a 3 month study leave in the early nineties. One module was exposition of bible books and the other concerned science and theology interface and dealt with the fundamental issues of existence, such as the questions where does the universe come from, what is the human soul? These are the issues which theology and philosophy have always discussed but now in recent years they have become the concern of some scientists. They are also the deep questions which ordinary people are asking today and seeking answers.

**Ann: Did lecturing at GBC give you an inkling that God would lead you to work full time in an academic setting?**

Howard: It was a wonderful preparation but at the time was the last thing in my mind. Although I knew the chaplaincy was becoming vacant I had no thought of applying until I received two phonecalls urging me to consider doing so. I was leaving on holiday so merely wrote a brief letter expressing interest. However the more I considered it, the more I was intrigued by the question as to why a secular institution in such a secular age would want someone to represent spiritual realities and the opportunity that presents. Cynics might say the university is merely upholding a tradition but it is certainly deeper than that and I was delighted to be interviewed and offered the post.

**Ann: I managed to survive an entire student career within the secure boundaries of a CU without ever meeting a chaplain. What does your role involve?**

Howard: I experienced a very warm welcome in the university where the Chaplaincy is given quite a high profile. Pastoral opportunities are limitless. I have started Sunday morning weekly services where mostly overseas students attend. British Christian students who attend CU tend to worship off campus. In the afternoons I frequently fill a minibus and we go out and about to different places. I have tried to build links with the wardens of each residence and to get to know as many students as possible, though with 1600 on Campus I feel we just scratch the surface. We have established a Staff Christian Fellowship and that has been pretty encouraging. The group are sponsoring a Millenial Lecture on the subject 'Has science buried God?' bringing John Lennox from Oxford and we hope that will make a significant impact. Every year there is a thanksgiving service where the University gathers to thank God for its establishment and existence which is rather remarkable for a secular institution in this secular age and at each graduation ceremony I open with a Christian prayer and end with a benediction and that is the expectation of the University.

As well as all that I am now teaching two modules at the university dealing with the science/religion interface and social and moral philosophy.

**Ann: You are in fact teaching similar material in two radically different establishments..1CC(the new amalgamation of GBC and Northumbria Bible College) and Heriot Watt, colleges with very different audiences. One clearly secular and the other explicitly Christian..**

**That must present an interesting challenge?**

Howard: It is tremendous to have such different outlets. ICC is an excellent college rooted in the Bible but anything but old fashioned. Its staff know the secular world where we live and witness and set high academic and spiritual standards which provide a helpful challenge to other forms of training for ministry. I would hope that the Board of Ministry in the Church of Scotland would be open enough to allow CofS students to train there. That could greatly benefit the Church.

At Heriot Watt I deal in lectures with such fundamental questions that students tell me "that is what we talk about down the pub at night" and the President of the Students Union told me he thinks of these issues every day

**Ann: You are involved on a daily basis with an age group that has largely disappeared from the Churches and yet you are saying they have a spiritual interest. Where have we gone wrong in the church and why have we lost them?**

Howard: How I wish I had the answer to that and as to why committed Christian students worship anywhere but in lively Church of Scotland congregations! For that is what I find here. The Church of Scotland is by and large, a "put off" for students. It is just not considered "switched on" and yet somewhere like Buccleuch Free

Church which has a sense of deep reverence and yet informality, completely lacking in 'gimmicks' can pack in young people week by week. There is no easy answer.

**Ann: Do you think a chaplain presents a less threatening presence to an outsider than the 'institutionalised church'?**

Howard: I do think people are shy about coming to church from the outside but they still look for a link to God. Chaplains in all sorts of areas are finding opportunities for pastoral work and openings for the Gospel and I think in the Church of Scotland we have put up barriers in the past.

**Ann: How can we break down barriers and build bridges into a secular society?**

Howard: My years in parish ministry confirmed for me that marriage, funerals and baptisms are the bread and butter of ministry and offer tremendous opportunities for the gospel.

When young people marry and start a family I think they genuinely often want to make a new start. I always greeted a couple seeking baptism with acceptance and fixed with them a future date, assuring them of God's love for them and for their baby. Then I would say as God and Christ are committed to you, you must commit to them and come to the Enquirers' class. They always came and some of my committed elders on my session came to faith by that route. Some might accuse me of an indiscriminate view of Baptism but I would rather be accused of breaking Church law, which actually I never did, than of turning people away from Christ and the church. Grace comes first. I am sure this is reflected in Jesus' ministry. It was in response to Jesus' indiscriminate coming to his home that Zacchaeus repented. We are in danger of presenting a "contract God" "to people outside of the church by saying commit to God first, come up to scratch and then we'll accept you. I think we alienate untold

numbers of young couples who are trying to make a connection with God and pluck up the courage to approach a minister.

**Ann: Howard you have been in the post here for 1 year. This is a 5 year renewable appointment. If you could now write the epitaph for your chaplaincy how would you like it to read?**

Howard: Is it too simplistic to suggest "He helped people to know the love of God in Christ and to find purpose for life and learning"

God alone makes sense of our universe. He who is the creator and preserver of all things cannot be less than us his creatures. We his creatures know something of the reality of love in our own lives. He therefore must be full of a very great love. True love will always make a sacrifice for the loved one so at the heart of God's self revelation is the Cross. That alone, amazing though it is, makes sense of the world. It is the one thing than drives me for life and has kept me confident in God..

**On that positive note we parted.**

# A Hazardous Calling

Eugene Peterson, the American author and preacher, tells in one of his books of going to donate blood. He was asked a number of questions by the nurse. When she enquired, 'Do you engage in hazardous work?' he gave the answer 'Yes.' Noting his clerical collar, she ignored his answer, perhaps dismissing it as frivolous.

Yet Peterson was right. To speak for God is hazardous. To be a prophet has never been a recipe for an easy life. Faithfulness in a preacher has often led to confrontation or opposition, even hostility. Preachers who have been true to the Word of God have seldom had to look for trouble. Examples spring readily to mind both from the pages of Scripture and church history. Jeremiah and Amos, John Bunyan and George Whitefield, John Calvin and Jonathan Edwards (among countless others) each, in their own way, had troubled and disrupted lives simply because they were faithful.

### **Dr Squintum**

Jonathan Edwards, as we know, was dismissed from his Northampton church, an experience shared by many a good and faithful preacher. George Whitefield was held up to derision in a play by Samuel Foote in which he was called 'Dr Squintum'. His response was to say, 'I am now mimicked and burlesqued upon the public stage. All hail such contempt!'

Amos was one of the great preachers of Old Testament times. There was a sharp edge to his preaching and, not surprisingly, it provoked reaction. He gives us an insight into his experience and his response to it in Amos 7:10-16. It all starts with a negative report, conveyed to King Jeroboam by Amaziah the priest of Bethel. A closer look at Amaziah proves interesting. Bethel where he served was the centre of the official, established religion of Israel. It was, as verse 13 tells us, 'the king's sanctuary and the temple of the kingdom'. Any priest at Bethel was therefore an establishment figure, in the pay or the pocket of the people in power. Amaziah's report on Amos has the accent of the ecclesiastic and the smell of the snug, conservative and superior. His whole tone suggests that he had a vested interest in doing down Amos.

Amos is raising a conspiracy against you in the very heart of Israel. The land cannot bear all his words. For this is what Amos is saying 'Jeroboam will die by the sword, and Israel will surely go into exile, away from their native land' (vv.10,11). In effect the charge against Amos by this ecclesiastic was, 'Amos is dangerous. He is challenging the way things are. He is threatening the status quo, the stability of things. He is raising questions about the king's policies, priorities and actions. He is undermining confidence in the king's reign.'

If we are honest we have to admit

that society sometimes prefers preachers more like Amaziah than Amos. Many would prefer us to be personal chaplains who will soothe and comfort, who will buttress things as they are. They prefer to look to us for support and encouragement and will react strongly if we embarrass or question. In the days when Scottish Television broadcast *Late Call* toward the end of the evening's programme, a churchman at a training session in the mould of the priest of Bethel made the comment: 'You are expecting us to serve up a cup of religious cocoa!' Anything Amos-like in its challenge would have put people off their sleep and removed the would-be broadcaster from the list.

### **Establishment preachers**

At the end of the Falklands War, Mrs Thatcher expected the Archbishop of Canterbury to preach to her tune at a service in St. Paul's. He didn't and was thereafter 'not one of us'. Society expects the preacher to prop up and justify its ways and to bless its programmes and policies. As long as we are establishment figures we shall be tolerated.

Even a congregation can demand of a preacher constant soothing and comforting words. Liberace was a popular pianist. He spoke of his secret. 'My whole trick is to keep the tune well up in front. If I play Tchaikovsky, I play his melodies and skip his spiritual struggles. I have to know how many notes my au-

# Some thoughts on Preaching by

**James Taylor,  
Retired Baptist Minister (now living in Alva)**

dience will stand for. If there is time left I fill in with runs up and down the keyboard'.

What if however, the preacher is more modelled on Amos than on Liberace? What if he asks questions which the hearers would rather not consider? 'Of what value is your success and achievement if you are failing to uphold justice and righteousness?' What if his words challenge and rebuke? 'Your way of life requires not encouragement but judgment.' In *The Contemplative Pastor* Eugene Peterson writes:

As a pastor I don't like being viewed as nice but insignificant. I bristle when a high level executive leaves the place of worship with the comment, 'That was wonderful, pastor, but we have to get back to the real world, don't we?' The pastor must be subversive—posing questions, exploding myths, exposing falsity.

## Disturbing questions

A preacher like Amos must always be exposing the emptiness of mere prosperity and the sham of empty religiosity. He will always be asking disturbing questions and reminding of God's judgment on disobedience and injustice. He must, if he is to remain faithful to his divine calling, be emphasising truths which many of his hearers would rather ignore. When a former Archbishop of Canterbury, Donald Coggan, was in Canada he was impressed by the fact that the Primate, Ted Scott, related the Gospel

to contemporary social issues. He expressed his admiration to a business man only to be told, 'I wish he would not interfere in all these current affairs'. When Donald Coggan retorted, 'His Master did that and they crucified him', he received the reply 'Oh, we wouldn't do that!' The assurance was empty. Those who have been uncomfortably challenged by the truth have hounded prophets, crucified the Master and reacted with antagonism to his messengers throughout the ages. Amaziah and his like are alive and active today.

Amaziah had several suggestions to make to Amos. The first was quite simply, 'Remove yourself! Get out, you seer! Go back to the land of Judah. Earn your bread there and do your prophesying there' (v.12). 'Make it easier for yourself and go where your ministry will be appreciated. Find a more congenial patch!' Does that sound familiar to preachers who are finding things difficult?

## A more congenial patch

Sometimes such a reaction comes from those we are disturbing, though often phrased in even more brutal terms. Sometimes it comes from friends and colleagues who know what we are facing and feel we could do with a quieter life. At times it can even come sliding into our own minds when we feel unappreciated or when our message and its honesty are proving unacceptable.

'Why don't I make it easier for myself by concentrating on outside interests and sitting lightly by the church?' 'Why don't I pull back a little by concentrating less on the preached word and developing different priorities in my ministry?' So many a preacher finds the ministries of counselling or denominational committee work or increased community involvement much more attractive and certainly less painful alternatives to declaring the Word of God without fear or favour! Some may even take the advice of Amaziah literally and consider moving. Listen again to Eugene Peterson in *Under the Unpredictable Plant*:

Every time a pastor abandons one congregation for another out of... anger or restlessness, the pastoral vocation of all of us is vitiated... The congregation is not a job site to be abandoned when a better offer comes along.

## Goebbels

Amaziah went even further. He rejected Amos and his ministry outright. 'Prophecy anywhere but here. Your message is not for us!' (v.13). The pressure can often be subtle to soft peddle our message and change our emphasis. 'Do you really need to be quite so straightforward? Can you not be a little more accommodating and tolerant?' Sometimes, however, we face open rejection of all that we say and stand for. Goebbels, the Minister of Information in Nazi Germany, sounded like

Amaziah: 'Churches dabbling in politics should take note that their only task is to prepare for the world hereafter.' Many a preacher has disagreed strongly and paid the price. Rejection has been because his message challenged the ongoing life style and value systems of his hearers.

A recent experience of the induction of a new minister proved disturbing. The usual vows were taken to be faithful in preaching God's Word. What kept coming into the mind was that the previous incumbent had been hounded out precisely because he had preached the Word in all its disturbing fulness.

### **A prophet not a poodle**

The response of Amos is instructive. First of all he established his attitude. I am not the kind of prophet who prophesies for pay (v.14. NEB). He was no mere professional who preached because it was his job and he could be bought, silenced or influenced. The defence counsel in the court is required to be dutifully professional. He is open to 'instruction' and personally unaffected by what he says. Not so the preacher in the mould of Amos. The true preacher or prophet is not there to defend what God condemns, to tell people what they like to hear or to justify ungodly life styles and values. He is certainly not in the pulpit to make sinners comfortable and safe. If that is what the people prefer then they want a poodle not a prophet and should pay someone to do it. Such false prophets are expensive as they pay with their own souls.

Secondly Amos affirmed his call from God. The Lord took me from tending the flock and said to me, "Go, prophesy to my people Israel" (v.15). The preacher receives his call, not primarily from those who occasionally or regularly hear him preach, but from the God to whom he is ultimately and finally responsible. What determines our attitude to reaction, whether it be positive or negative, is not popularity but obedience. The preacher's responsibility is to speak to the world with a voice which is not an echo of its own. Bishop Charles Gore of Birmingham used to address candidates for the Anglican ministry on

the eve of their ordination in this way. 'Tomorrow I will say to you, "Wilt thou, Wilt thou, Wilt thou?" But there will come a day when Another will say to you, "Hast thou, Hast thou, Hast thou?"'

### **The supreme consideration**

Paul adopted something like the attitude of Amos when he responded to his critics in Corinth. They were prepared to judge or react to him negatively. To say that he 'couldn't have cared less' about their attitude is perhaps putting it a little too strongly but he certainly discounted it. What mattered supremely to him was obedience to the call of God and faithfulness in delivering the gospel message. For that he would be ultimately answerable to God (1 Cor.4:1-4).

Unless the preacher is prepared to face condemnation in the final judgment, he has no option but to remain faithful to his call no matter how painful it may be. He may be the most unlikely of people, akin to a shepherd and a watcher of sycamore trees like Amos, with the most humble and ordinary of backgrounds, but his resilience lies in believing that the Lord took him and said, 'Go, prophesy...' Calls and pressure to be silent meet a brick wall in such a person.

We are not surprised to see the utter fearlessness of Amos. Amaziah may file a bad report and tell him what to do with himself but, nothing daunted, Amos continues to preach. 'You say, "Do not prophesy; stop preaching..." Therefore this is what the Lord says....' We can detect on his part no hesitation, no pause to count the cost. He goes straight on, his heart heavy with the word of God. What God has given him to say he will say. He is a faithful messenger and courageous with it. No fear of man troubles him. Or at the very least, his fear of God far outweighs any human trepidation.

John Knox was in the same mould. His words to Queen Mary display the same fearlessness. 'In the preaching place, Madame, I am not master of myself, but must obey him who commands me to speak plain, and to flatter no flesh upon the face of the earth. He is a bearer

of a message from God and no one will stop him from delivering it.'

### **An inescapable challenge**

There are people in every congregation whom our faithful, obedient words will strike and who could well, by their reaction, anticipated or actual, strike fear in our hearts. The one who back-pedals and softens his message to avoid giving offence will not be the first preacher who has been silenced through anxiety over the relevance of what he has been given to say. Prepare to preach on God's demand for justice and before ever you reach the pulpit you can anticipate, still sitting at your study desk, how the unjust employer in the congregation will react. It will not always be the reaction of conviction leading to repentance! That is why the temptation is to water down the inescapable challenge of God's word. Examples of the same situation flood into every preacher's mind they are so common. What would Amos have done? The answer is obvious.

At some time or other we all experience a reaction similar to what Amos experienced, especially if our message has the sharp bite and edge of faithfulness to Scripture. We shall be tempted to soft pedal, to change our emphasis or to develop another gift, even to move elsewhere. Our responsibility is to look at ourselves. Am I a true or false prophet?

A caveat: I am not advocating a harsh, ungracious, belligerent attitude in the preacher, which has too often led some to adopt an impudent, brash approach which can never be justified from Scripture. Rather am I urging we brace ourselves to fulfil our responsibilities before God. Above all, that we reaffirm our call and go on to fearless obedience and faithfulness. Make no mistake, such faithful obedience most certainly will be hazardous.

## **Book reviews**

### **Brief History of Christian Spirituality**

Bradley Holt

Lion Publishing, Oxford, 1997. 192pp.  
£7.99

ISBN O 7459 3721 7

This book tells the multicultural story of Christian history as it relates to spirituality and personal experience. It is written by a professor who found there was no appropriate text for the course in Christian spirituality which he taught at Augsburg College.

Holt begins by exploring the meaning of the term 'spirituality' in its historical and global context. He establishes it in the four relationships found in the Bible between God and creation, ourselves and others. He goes on to trace the historical development of spirituality through the early centuries, the medieval age, the Reformation, the 'Modern' era and the twentieth century. He concludes by drawing the themes together and making suggestions for the future. Appendix 1 is a helpful time line. Appendix 2 contains eight very practical spiritual exercises. There is also a glossary of specialized terms, and indexes of names and subjects.

The author's aim of writing a simple account with global perspective and practical application is admirably realized. Although limited by space, he has included well known individuals and ordinary folk, as well as a variety of popular movements such as Celtic spirituality, charismatic Christianity, liberation theology, twelve step spirituality and pietism. He gives examples of spiritual writing to whet the appetite, perceptive critical evaluations, and a bibliography at the end of each chapter for further study.

This book is a first class, accessible introduction to the subject. Not only does it demonstrate different approaches to spirituality, illuminating the dangers of parochialism, but it also shows how the boundaries of Scripture and the creeds can still be maintained amid a variety of experience, history and

geography. Holt's exercise in bringing together the intellectual 'left brain' with the experiential and emotional 'right brain' is challenging, informative and inspirational. Very timely and highly recommended.

Fiona Barnard, St Andrews

### **Hidden Sayings of Jesus**

William Morrice

SPCK, London, 1997. 247pp. £14.99  
ISBN 0-281-04922-X

What an admirably clear book. Morrice evaluates the authenticity of sayings attributed to Jesus outside the four Gospels, from the NT and elsewhere. *Hidden Sayings* is intended for general readership and mostly succeeds, with thumbnail introductions to the formation of the canon, apocryphisation, modern criticism, papyri and codices.

The sayings are graded, from A = most likely to be authentic, to D = most doubtful. The book is in five parts. Part 1 examines how material was selected for the canon of scripture. It defends using the NT Apocrypha to discover the mind of Jesus. Chapter 3 explores the tests for authenticating the Hidden Sayings. Of the statement, '82% of words attributed to Jesus in the Gospels were not spoken by him' Morrice only says 'This may have been over-sceptical' but his own methods are careful rather than either dismissive or gullible.

Part 2 sets out the results from the papyri, particularly Oxyrhynchus. Part 3 concentrates on the Coptic Gospel of Thomas. Morrice identifies a significant amount of 'Grade A' material, especially parables and beatitudes

Part 4 lists material from other sources: the infancy Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel and Acts of Peter, early Christian writers and Arabic sources including the Koran.

Part 5 summarises the findings. Of 253 fragments chosen, Morrice identifies 11 'A' and 25 'B' items that are not already in the NT. There are, by the criteria identified in Part 1, fresh light (if not radically new) on Jesus' teaching, especially the parables, and some vivid additional sayings. Morrice identifies two emphases: the transitoriness of life

on earth, and the folly of setting our heart on material possessions.

This is a painstaking and often fascinating book. Two weaknesses: Morrice fails to explain his overlapping reference systems, and fails also to be adequately critical of modern criticism, that slave to fashion. The indices and bibliography are helpful and the proofreading good.

C Peter White, Glasgow

### **The Way Forward? Christian Voices on Homosexuality and the Church**

Ed. Timothy Bradshaw

Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1998.

225pp. £8.99

ISBN 0 340 69393 2

The issue of homosexuality in the Church has been the big controversy of the 1990's. Debate on the subject has been marked by fierce argument, demonising rhetoric and increasing polarisation often played out in front of TV cameras and in the media.

Many feel that there is a need for calm debate and a more measured dialogue — to clarify points of common understanding and identify key points of genuine disagreement. This calmer approach was first put forward in the St Andrew's Day Statement of November 1995 which attempted to define the theological ground on which the whole issue should be addressed.

*The Way Forward* has been written as a response to the St Andrew's Day Statement. It is, in fact a collection of 12 essays whose authors come from a wide range of backgrounds and perspectives. The contributors are all leading writers and in their fields are serious commentators on homosexuality in the Church, with strong opinions, using carefully reasoned arguments for the stance they take.

The result is perhaps the most extensive examination of what 'the church' has to say on homosexuality. A book like this is unlikely to change strongly held opinions but it will certainly deepen the quality of the debate. It is not an easy read — many of the essays are highly theological and most probe deeply the

themes of human desire and imagination in relation to contemporary social patterns and to moral order — complex issues, which to grasp, demand careful, concentrated reading.

Certainly, then, a serious book, but it is worth persevering if you want to be well informed on this thorny subject. *The Way Forward* is likely to be an essential resource for all concerned Christians and may provide tentative solutions to some of the problems faced by those involved in pastoral care for homosexuals.

Oliver Ferguson, Bangor

### **Discovering James**

David Field

Crossway Books, Leicester, 1998. 184pp.

£4.99

ISBN 1-85684-174-X

The reader who longs for practical Bible commentaries need look no further than this Crossway series of Bible Guides and this particular one on the letter of James.

This book, meant for ordinary people, may be used in either personal or group Bible Study and, refreshingly, it majors on helping readers to think biblically for themselves and not wait to be spoonfed with others' ideas. The initial chapter dealing with methods of Bible Study and giving an overview of the book of James itself contains many gems and the clear format, with heavy type headings and pictorial symbols indicating different kinds of study, make for helpful presentation.

The author makes it clear that 'James' is a book for hurting Christians, facing trials and under stress a book, in fact, for us all. Its explanation of the biblical text is firmly grounded in practical examples taken from all kinds of experiences from botany to aeronautical engineering.

Each chapter, dealing with a few verses, has a snappy memorable title at the start and some questions to stimulate discussion and action at the end. There are pithy summaries of the verses, sometimes in the form of easily remembered points; the one in the first chapter, dealing with the Bible's teaching on encouragement to Christians undergoing

### **Book reviews**

suffering, is particularly memorable.

Where the author digs deeper into the meaning of original text it is never pedantic but always practical. His discussion on the different meanings of the word translated 'doubt' in the first chapter of 'James' is especially helpful.

The 'Study in Depth' sections dealing with doctrinal issues such as suffering and Divine wrath again are never academic but always explained with application for consequent action.

This is not a book for theological students dealing in textual minutiae; it is a book for all thinking Christians wanting to grow daily more like Jesus.

Sheila Steele, Bangor

### **Power for God's Sake - Power and Abuse in the Local Church**

Paul Beasley-Murray

Paternoster Press, Carlisle, 1998. 194pp.

£8.99

ISBN 0-85364-899-9

Power, says the author is 'the big unrecognised temptation in the church' and 'the biggest issue Jesus had to face in his life.' Certainly it is a controversial, pervasive and explosive matter, and one that is all the more dangerous because (as Beasley-Murray rightly notes) it is often the hidden agenda and is often handled with a 'God is on my side' approach that can be hurtful and detrimental to the health of the Body of Christ. Therefore it is good to have a book that seeks a) to bring the matter into the open and b) to provide some biblical and theological basis for dealing with power.

Firstly, the responses to a survey of ministers associated with the Richard Baxter Institute of Ministry and of office bearers in their congregations set out in the first part of the book, provide a lot of food for thought. However, it should be noted that the survey is rather small (141 ministers, 112 office bearers), perhaps too narrow in clientele and also as Beasley-Murray himself confesses in the text, some questions are too vague or not quite right to draw out the re-

## Book reviews

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quired information. Nevertheless, these reservations aside, there is a good deal of helpful and stimulating material in this part, a lot to be anxious about and to address (I was particularly struck by the obvious differences in perception of ministers and office bearers: how we see ourselves and are seen by others is something we all ought to check on).

In the second part of the book we are given theological and pastoral insights into power. Sections on Jesus' leadership as servant and as shepherd are highlights here. Readers familiar with other Paul Beasley-Murray books will notice how readily he gets back to familiar points: ministers need for appraisal, spiritual directors, a code of ethics, vision and goal-setting. This section would have been stronger had there been more on the interplay of power and status and power and authority: nothing is said of things like titles, minister's dress, implicit (and explicit) ways in which there is a promotion structure in denominations and other ways we deal in power and status (ordination?).

A great service is done, though, in clearly pointing out that power is about; that it can be used well or badly, that awareness and self-awareness need promoted and that Jesus' life has a lot of light to shine on this matter for us.

Gordon R. Palmer. Edinburgh

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### In the Lion's Den

Nina Shea

Broadman and Holman Publishers, Nashville, 1997. 126 pp, \$10.

ISBN O-8054-6357-7 (pbk)

The contents of this book will be of no surprise to church leaders who regularly read material for information and prayer coming from missionary bodies concerned with the church under communist regimes and in majority Islamic states. The compilation will be of use, nevertheless, to focus minds, and to help inform praying Christians.

The real challenge of the book is to

action. We know the facts, at least in broad outline, of the persecution of the church in many parts of the world today. The author's concern is that Christians, in the United States in the first place, should not stand idly by while their fellows suffer, but should lobby governments to change the basic situation which makes persecution possible. This challenge should be carefully assessed by the readers.

The book has, understandably, a focussed and therefore limited view. It may be useful to read along with it volumes such as Peter Partner's *God of Battles* which attempts to place Islamic fundamentalism in the context of history. The true outcome of Nina Shea's work will be to lead Christians to pray with greater understanding and more earnest intercession for their suffering fellow-believers.

Iain Mackenzie, Tarbat

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### Making Life Work

Bill Hybels

IVP. Leicester, 1998. 282pp, £4.99  
ISBN 0-85110-898-9

*Making Life Work* is a series of personal reflections by Bill Hybels on the book of Proverbs. In twelve readable chapters he outlines his encounter with a book whose message to its reader is 'put God's wisdom into action.' His thesis spells out the fact that only God knows how life works and in his Word he makes his wisdom available to all who take the time to read it, reflect on it and put it into action in their lives. He tells us that the proverb of Proverbs is to be found in Proverbs 3:5-6 and that in the adventure we call life, God is to be trusted in everything.

This is a well-written book using language that makes it an easy and enjoyable read capable of being read by a wide audience. In a very accessible way it tries to convince its reader to pursue the wisdom of God that taking initiative is wiser than being passive or lazy or fatalistic; that doing good is better than becoming absorbed in our own selfishness; that the difficult task of developing self-discipline results in great

blessings; that speaking the truth in love is better than spinning webs of deceit; that choosing friends wisely is a significant key to growing in wisdom; that marrying well is the foundation of a lasting marriage; that working to build strong families is the best way to build future generations; that cultivating compassion is a powerful way to change the world; and that managing anger constructively is vital to personal happiness and harmony in relationships.

The book contains clear illustrations with a pattern that sees each chapter begin with a relevant illustration, meeting the reader in the present, before moving him on to the biblical text. However, the book is not designed as a study tool but rather as a good read for Christian's generally and as a useful book to have on the shelves of the congregational library.

Donald Campbell, Dumfries

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### The Church in the Age of the T.V. Image

Rev Simon Vibert

Fellowship of Word and spirit, 1993. 23pp 2.50.

Another of the Orthos booklets, which despite its size, seeks to grapple with the challenge to preaching, posed by the pluralism and methodology of modern culture. There is a relevant analysis of the interface between modern telecommunications and the society it purports to serve, broadly concluding that each has become visual, instant and secular in its outlook and tastes.

A perceptive critique is then offered in the light of biblical revelation which concludes that despite real developments in visual and verbal communication which we must take account of, preaching cannot be subject to this 'spirit of the age' and cannot be 'repackaged' in today's concepts and methodologies without doing serious damage to its nature and function. In the light of this we are encouraged to restate the primacy of the Word, and to preach it with confidence and relevance - judging, as it were, not the Word by society but society by the Word.

Stanley A. Brook. Edinburgh

**Manual of Congregational Principles**

R.W. Dale

Quinta Press, Oswestry, 1996. 246pp.

£13.00

ISBN 1 897856 03 2

This book would be a profitable read for someone particularly committed to, or interested in, congregationalism as a form of church government but is of limited value to those who see the form of church government as a largely secondary issue in the day to day work of serving a congregation.

Rather than commending congregationalism as a workable model of church government Dale strives to establish congregationalism as the only acceptable form of church government. By establishing his principles with a laborious method of proof Dale works his way to conclude that: 'By the will of Christ every society of Christians organised for Christian worship, instruction and fellowship is a Christian Church and is independent of external control.'

For ministers who work away quietly in a congregation which submits to a certain amount of external control this is a long read only to come to the conclusion that: our form of church government is not approved of by those who hold strongly to some form of dependency.

Dale writes with a warm passion for Christ's church but I feel has an unrealistic attitude towards church membership. Christ's parable about the weeds would sit very uneasily with Dales writing. 'Do you want us to go and pull up the weeds?' they asked him No, he answered, because as you pull up the weeds you might pull up some of the wheat along with them. Let the wheat and the weeds both grow together until harvest.'

*A Peter Dickson, Aberdeen*

**The Problem of Eternal Punishment**

J I Packer

Disley, Orthos (Fellowship of Word and Spirit), 1995. 16pp. £1.50  
(no ISBN)

This booklet is far from being a comfortable one to read and, although it may

well be necessary as a catalyst to renew thinking on the issue, is not easily palatable. The human heart recoils from what is the biblical teaching on hell, and modern thinkers would prefer to proclaim 'Hell is dead' and the concept of everlasting punishment that of a debased Christianity. Yet the One who taught most about the everlasting nature of hell was the Lord Jesus Himself who warned with severity 'Be afraid of the One who can destroy both body and soul in Hell' — Matt 10:28. Likewise, the apostolic writers could do no more and no less than their Master in echoing such warnings.

Dr Packer gives his reason for expounding this issue (initially given as a paper to the Australian Evangelical Alliance) as the growing uncertainty in evangelical circles about eternal punishment, which he maintains, undermines evangelism. Notable leaders in the evangelical world, including John Stott, John Wenham and Philip Hughes, have elected for conditional immortality and ultimate annihilation for all those who remain outside Christ. Despite their constant appeals to scripture, their cases will not stand the test of scrutiny, and, Dr Packer charges, are speculative. Conditionalists are guilty of attempting 'to evade the natural meaning of some dozens of relevant passages' (p 12). At the same time, he also rejects 'universalism', the comfortable doctrine that in the end *all* will be saved, as the world's first lie. (The serpent told Eve that, despite God's threat, she would not die.)

On the other hand, Packer is determined to avoid the lurid imagery of many preachers of an earlier era, including Spurgeon and Jonathan Edwards. He declines to use words such as 'torment' and 'punishment' because of the overtones now laid on them. He favours the concept of retribution, expressed in such a way as Jesus and the apostles did to create 'traumatic awe; a passionate gladness that justice will be done for God's glory, linked with an equally passionate sadness that fellow human beings, no matter how perverse, will be ruined' (p 60).

What constitutes hell? The loss of all

**Book reviews**

goodness, pleasure, rest and hope; exclusion from God's favour and exposure to his anger; remorse, frustration, fury and despair, self-hate, and introversion to the point of idiocy. These, however, are only 'category words' and, in terms of experience, beyond what we can imagine.

Those who go to hell do so by choosing to be self-absorbed and to keep God out of their lives. The Christian is not to speculate about hell, but to spend his life in finding ways of showing gratitude for the saving grace of Christ, and to school his mind to dwell on heaven rather than on the other place.

*Peter Cook, Cumbria*

**Awaiting the Millennium**

Richard Kyle

IVP, Leicester, 1998. 201pp. £9.99

ISBN 0-85111-581-0

Historically, Kyle traces the rise and fall of the kind of millennial expectation that awaits some imminent utopian era. This could be either the thousand-year reign of Christ on earth, or some other golden era as defined by non-Christian religions or philosophies. He also documents the related apocalyptic fear of the catastrophic end-days that are expected to either precede or succeed this new utopia.

Discussion of our own generation, however, is a bit thin. Society's collective consciousness is dominated by belief in an impending apocalypse, but it is a secular apocalypse of nuclear devastation, or environmental collapse, or natural disaster, with little hope of any utopian era to follow. Post-millennial optimism of faith in human development until Eden is reclaimed has been overtaken by pre-millennial pessimism that somehow human depravity is increasing to the point of self-destruction.

Far from being the focus for the culmination of these fears, however, the year 2000 looms as a bright spot on an otherwise bleak horizon, a momentary, and very welcome, distraction from the

## Book reviews

true destiny of human existence. It really is little more than an excuse for a party, but the way in which it has so grabbed the collective imagination is closely related to the apocalyptic age within which it has arisen.

I'm not sure that Kyle has really captured either this apocalyptic mood, or the significance of the year 2000 celebrations. Nor did he develop any interaction between the saving grace of faith in Jesus Christ and the pessimism of our age.

He set out to be objective and historical in his approach, and as far as that goes he achieved his aim, but the church really needs a prophetic word for our own generation. We need to hear the challenge both of apocalyptic fear and of empty and meaningless celebration, and we need to respond to it more boldly with the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

*Douglas R. Robertson, Appin*

### **Let's Study Philippians**

Sinclair B Ferguson  
Banner of Truth, Edinburgh, 1997.  
136 pp, £4.95  
ISBN 085151 7145

The back cover sets out the stall: *Let's Study Philippians* is the first in a series of commentaries written to encourage ordinary Christians to read, understand and apply God's Word. Designed to be used by individuals, in family devotions, or by groups, each volume features an exposition of Scripture and contains a study guide.'

This is probably as clear and accessible as anything you will read on Philippians. The style is easy and manages to avoid becoming technical. There is probably enough detail for the average minister and certainly enough for someone leading a Bible Study. A very firm structure is imposed which helps to keep the material manageable. There are 27 chapters, each only four pages long, dealing with three to five verses. This bite-size approach means dipping into the book is quite possible and has ensured that the author does not get car-

ried away into the realms of scholarship in some of the more interesting passages. Equally, it means the whole book is covered. Many commentaries run out of steam by the final chapter where more 'mundane' details feature. By contrast, I found the writer's comments on Philippians 4 amongst the most helpful.

There is a group study outline for every two chapters. The questions on the Biblical text are good. Life application is weaker though, and I think more could have been done to help group leaders anchor the message of the text in the here and now.

In this series, *Let's Study Mark* is now available and Hebrews and Mark are in the pipeline. If they maintain the standard, I think this will prove to be an affordable and useful series.

*Neil Dougall, Edinburgh*

### **Gypsy From The Forest**

David Lazell  
Gwasg Bryntirion, Bridgend, 1997.  
256 pp.  
ISBN 1 85049 132 1

Every now and then you come across a book which it is a delight to read. You are in turn informed, enlightened, challenged and stimulated. *Gypsy From The Forest* is such a book.

Having read the book, I am almost ashamed to admit that I had not previously heard of Gipsy Smith, let alone his long ministry. We are indebted to David Lazell for having written so eloquently, so compellingly, so attractively about Gipsy.

This is a book which is a rarity in this day — a gentle book. As you begin to read you are taken into a bygone age of courtesy and gentleness. Indeed, this biography is both winsome and gentle, like the man it seeks to portray. Gipsy Smith is the archetypal evangelist who "sought always to be all things to all men that he might win them for Christ." The man who steps out of the page is a three-dimensional character, full of humanity, humour and a holy boldness — a man with a passionate concern for the unconverted and a commensurate zeal for His Lord. But it is never sentimental nor uncritical.

For newcomers to the world of the Romany, it is a revelation. Informative, it is still interesting; and these are, as we know, not always synonymous. And yet it is not a static world. The period of history which Gipsy's life covered was one of incredibly rapid change; and through the pages of the book we see the man adapt, not the content of his gospel, but its presentation to that rapidly changing society. Indeed, one of the book's main strengths is the way in which the author relates his biography to its context. Throughout the chapters there are frequent references to the prevailing social and historical background which puts the subject in its larger setting. This is particularly well done in the case of the chapter on 'Co-operation in evangelism', where the National Council of Evangelical Free Churches, of which Gipsy became the staff evangelist in 1897, became increasingly involved in political matters. This interweaving of the biographical and ecclesiastical with the larger social and political context has produced a book which is both socially relevant and still makes many modern parallels.

Reading the biography of Gipsy Smith produced two complementary reactions. The first was a wistfulness for a gentler bygone era; the second a rekindled desire, inspired by his example, to bring the gospel to our day as freshly and relevantly as he did. And surely inspiration for the present is what biography should ultimately be about. I would thoroughly recommend this book.

*Alan Macgregor, Banff*

### **Revival Year Sermons**

C H Spurgeon  
Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1996.  
96pp. £2.95  
ISBN 085151 703 X

There are five sermons in this book all preached in 1859 when Spurgeon was only twenty-four years of age. At the beginning of the year, Spurgeon prayed '...we do seek for the pouring out of the Spirit of God...Oh that there would come a rushing mighty wind that would carry everything before it'. It came later that year. He wrote 'The times of re-

freshing from the presence of the Lord have at last dawned upon our land'. The five sermons we are told, are typical of the type preached that year.

The first one from Psalm 44:1, is entitled 'The Story of God's Mighty Acts'. It recalls the days of revival in Scripture and up through the centuries, and Spurgeon encourages his hearers to believe that God has not changed. He says 'we shall never get a revival here unless we believe that it is the Lord, and the Lord alone, that can do it'.

The second sermon is entitled 'The Blood of the Everlasting Covenant' and concerns the covenant between God and Christ made before the world began. This is an important doctrine that many Christians today would do well to study. However, it is a pity that while Spurgeon elaborates on the importance of this doctrine, he does not quote many Scriptures proofs of the various and intricate aspects of this doctrine. Those who have not heard of this covenant will want more Biblical proof than is here.

The third sermon is on 'The Necessity of the Spirit's Work'. Here Spurgeon shows how from beginning to end it is God alone, through the work of the Spirit that makes us acceptable in His sight. He asks 'Have you ever tried to ask a man to repent? Without the promise of the Spirit to help him is to urge him to do an impossibility'.

The fourth sermon is 'Predestination and Calling'. He mentions the general call of the gospel which many hear and understand, and then follows with the effectual call of the gospel which is accompanied by the Holy Spirit's saving work and is always effectual. 'This call is sent to the predestinated and to them only'.

The last sermon is 'The Minister's Farewell' preached on his last Sunday in Surrey Garden's Music Hall. There are sincere appeals to those who had not come to Christ. He condemns the imbalanced Calvinists who 'shut their eyes to one half of the Bible and cannot see the responsibility of the sinner'. He also exposes the error of the other extreme those who have 'practice without doctrine'.

This book shows that doctrine is ker-

nel to true revivals. Spurgeon emphasised this point in these sermons. He believed that there could be no true revival without true doctrine. Spurgeon meets face-on all the controversial areas of Calvinistic doctrine and is not hindered in the misrepresentations of truth. He preaches his heart out for Christ, believing that the gospel preached faithfully will bring sinners to Christ.

*Donald Macaskill, Dundee*

## **Book reviews**

and burning hearts'. These are Bob Fyall's convictions about preaching. Certainly this little booklet of his should be required reading for anyone one trying to unearth the value and relevance of the story-passages of the Old Testament. Let minds be enlightened and hearts set alight. Let the stories live. Bob!

*James S. Dewar, Reay*

### **Preaching Old Testament Narrative**

Bob Fyall

Grove Books, Cambridge. 24pp. £2.25  
ISBN 1851743464

This readable little book has set me thinking about the way in which I have preached and will preach the story passages of the Bible, especially the Old Testament. Bob Fyall aimed 'to explore the fascination of Old Testament narrative and to help people to teach and preach this more effectively'. He has succeeded admirably.

'Story is so important in the Bible, not least because there is so much of it'. In introducing his material, the author asks us to look at the plot of the story, the characters, the setting and the point of view of the story. These are the theoretical principles around which the narrative is built. He then works out these principles with reference to I & 2 Kings.

At the heart of the booklet there is a series of 10 sermons on I & 2 Kings and each of them is summarised in a paragraph or two. He then takes 2 of these sermons to analyse them in more detail: 'Solomon's half-hearted commitment' in I Kings 1-11: 'The Lord enthroned as King' in 2 Kings 18 and 19. The great advantage of this approach is that the theoretical principles of chapter 1 are beautifully 'earthed' in real preaching material. While Bob Fyall is a tutor in Biblical Studies in Durham, he is also the minister of Claypath URC Congregation — these are sermons he has preached.

'This booklet has been written in the conviction that the whole Bible is valuable and relevant... Opening the Scriptures leads to enlightened minds